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THEATRE NUMBER



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PLATO
MARLOWE
WILDE
MAUGHAM

Politics, royal intrigue, and the subtext of suppression are examined in these four plays by four of our greatest dramatists. Compilatino by Matt Pierard.

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Menexenus*, by Plato

PERSONS OF THE DIALOGUE: Socrates and Menexenus.

SOCRATES: Whence come you, Menexenus? Are you from the Agora?

MENEXENUS: Yes, Socrates; I have been at the Council.

SOCRATES: And what might you be doing at the Council? And yet I need hardly ask, for I see that you, believing yourself to have arrived at the end of education and of philosophy, and to have had enough of them, are mounting upwards to things higher still, and, though rather young for the post, are intending to govern us elder men, like the rest of your family, which has always provided some one who kindly took care of us.

MENEXENUS: Yes, Socrates, I shall be ready to hold office, if you allow and advise that I should, but not if you think otherwise. I went to the council chamber because I heard that the Council was about to choose some one who was to speak over the dead. For you know that there is to be a public funeral?

SOCRATES: Yes, I know. And whom did they choose?

MENEXENUS: No one; they delayed the election until tomorrow, but I believe that either Archinus or Dion will be chosen.

SOCRATES: O Menexenus! Death in battle is certainly in many respects a noble thing. The dead man gets a fine and costly funeral, although he may have been poor, and an elaborate speech is made over him by a wise man who has long ago prepared what he has to say, although he who is praised may not have been good for much. The speakers praise him for what he has done and for what he has not done--that is the beauty of them--and they steal away our souls with their embellished words; in every conceivable form they praise the city; and they praise those who died in war, and all our ancestors who went before us; and they praise ourselves also who are still alive, until I feel quite elevated by their laudations, and I stand listening to their words, Menexenus, and become enchanted by them, and all in a moment I imagine myself to have become a greater and nobler and finer man than I was before. And if, as often happens, there are any foreigners who accompany me to the speech, I become suddenly conscious of having a sort of triumph over them, and they seem to experience a corresponding feeling of admiration at me, and at the greatness of the city, which appears to them, when they are under the influence of the speaker, more wonderful than ever. This consciousness of dignity lasts me more than three days, and not until the fourth or fifth day do I come to my senses and know where I am; in the meantime I have been living in the Islands of the Blest. Such is the art of our rhetoricians, and in such manner does the sound of their

words keep ringing in my ears.

MENEXENUS: You are always making fun of the rhetoricians, Socrates; this time, however, I am inclined to think that the speaker who is chosen will not have much to say, for he has been called upon to speak at a moment's notice, and he will be compelled almost to improvise.

SOCRATES: But why, my friend, should he not have plenty to say? Every rhetorician has speeches ready made; nor is there any difficulty in improvising that sort of stuff. Had the orator to praise Athenians among Peloponnesians, or Peloponnesians among Athenians, he must be a good rhetorician who could succeed and gain credit. But there is no difficulty in a man's winning applause when he is contending for fame among the persons whom he is praising.

MENEXENUS: Do you think not, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Certainly 'not.'

MENEXENUS: Do you think that you could speak yourself if there should be a necessity, and if the Council were to choose you?

SOCRATES: That I should be able to speak is no great wonder, Menexenus, considering that I have an excellent mistress in the art of rhetoric,--she who has made so many good speakers, and one who was the best among all the Hellenes--Pericles, the son of Xanthippus.

MENEXENUS: And who is she? I suppose that you mean Aspasia.

SOCRATES: Yes, I do; and besides her I had Connus, the son of Metrobius, as a master, and he was my master in music, as she was in rhetoric. No wonder that a man who has received such an education should be a finished speaker; even the pupil of very inferior masters, say, for example, one who had learned music of Lamprus, and rhetoric of Antiphon the Rhamnusian, might make a figure if he were to praise the Athenians among the Athenians.

MENEXENUS: And what would you be able to say if you had to speak?

SOCRATES: Of my own wit, most likely nothing; but yesterday I heard Aspasia composing a funeral oration about these very dead. For she had been told, as you were saying, that the Athenians were going to choose a speaker, and she repeated to me the sort of speech which he should deliver, partly improvising and partly from previous thought, putting together fragments of the funeral oration which Pericles spoke, but which, as I believe, she composed.

MENEXENUS: And can you remember what Aspasia said?

SOCRATES: I ought to be able, for she taught me, and she was ready to

strike me because I was always forgetting.

MENEXENUS: Then why will you not rehearse what she said?

SOCRATES: Because I am afraid that my mistress may be angry with me if I publish her speech.

MENEXENUS: Nay, Socrates, let us have the speech, whether Aspasia's or any one else's, no matter. I hope that you will oblige me.

SOCRATES: But I am afraid that you will laugh at me if I continue the games of youth in old age.

MENEXENUS: Far otherwise, Socrates; let us by all means have the speech.

SOCRATES: Truly I have such a disposition to oblige you, that if you bid me dance naked I should not like to refuse, since we are alone. Listen then: If I remember rightly, she began as follows, with the mention of the dead:--(Thucyd.)

There is a tribute of deeds and of words. The departed have already had the first, when going forth on their destined journey they were attended on their way by the state and by their friends; the tribute of words remains to be given to them, as is meet and by law ordained. For noble words are a memorial and a crown of noble actions, which are given to the doers of them by the hearers. A word is needed which will duly praise the dead and gently admonish the living, exhorting the brethren and descendants of the departed to imitate their virtue, and consoling their fathers and mothers and the survivors, if any, who may chance to be alive of the previous generation. What sort of a word will this be, and how shall we rightly begin the praises of these brave men? In their life they rejoiced their own friends with their valour, and their death they gave in exchange for the salvation of the living. And I think that we should praise them in the order in which nature made them good, for they were good because they were sprung from good fathers. Wherefore let us first of all praise the goodness of their birth; secondly, their nurture and education; and then let us set forth how noble their actions were, and how worthy of the education which they had received.

And first as to their birth. Their ancestors were not strangers, nor are these their descendants sojourners only, whose fathers have come from another country; but they are the children of the soil, dwelling and living in their own land. And the country which brought them up is not like other countries, a stepmother to her children, but their own true mother; she bore them and nourished them and received them, and in her bosom they now repose. It is meet and right, therefore, that we should begin by praising the land which is their mother, and that will be a way of praising their noble birth.

The country is worthy to be praised, not only by us, but by all mankind;

first, and above all, as being dear to the Gods. This is proved by the strife and contention of the Gods respecting her. And ought not the country which the Gods praise to be praised by all mankind? The second praise which may be fairly claimed by her, is that at the time when the whole earth was sending forth and creating diverse animals, tame and wild, she our mother was free and pure from savage monsters, and out of all animals selected and brought forth man, who is superior to the rest in understanding, and alone has justice and religion. And a great proof that she brought forth the common ancestors of us and of the departed, is that she provided the means of support for her offspring. For as a woman proves her motherhood by giving milk to her young ones (and she who has no fountain of milk is not a mother), so did this our land prove that she was the mother of men, for in those days she alone and first of all brought forth wheat and barley for human food, which is the best and noblest sustenance for man, whom she regarded as her true offspring. And these are truer proofs of motherhood in a country than in a woman, for the woman in her conception and generation is but the imitation of the earth, and not the earth of the woman. And of the fruit of the earth she gave a plenteous supply, not only to her own, but to others also; and afterwards she made the olive to spring up to be a boon to her children, and to help them in their toils. And when she had herself nursed them and brought them up to manhood, she gave them Gods to be their rulers and teachers, whose names are well known, and need not now be repeated. They are the Gods who first ordered our lives, and instructed us in the arts for the supply of our daily needs, and taught us the acquisition and use of arms for the defence of the country.

Thus born into the world and thus educated, the ancestors of the departed lived and made themselves a government, which I ought briefly to commemorate. For government is the nurture of man, and the government of good men is good, and of bad men bad. And I must show that our ancestors were trained under a good government, and for this reason they were good, and our contemporaries are also good, among whom our departed friends are to be reckoned. Then as now, and indeed always, from that time to this, speaking generally, our government was an aristocracy--a form of government which receives various names, according to the fancies of men, and is sometimes called democracy, but is really an aristocracy or government of the best which has the approval of the many. For kings we have always had, first hereditary and then elected, and authority is mostly in the hands of the people, who dispense offices and power to those who appear to be most deserving of them. Neither is a man rejected from weakness or poverty or obscurity of origin, nor honoured by reason of the opposite, as in other states, but there is one principle--he who appears to be wise and good is a governor and ruler. The basis of this our government is equality of birth; for other states are made up of all sorts and unequal conditions of men, and therefore their governments are unequal; there are tyrannies and there are oligarchies, in which the one party are slaves and the others masters. But we and our citizens are brethren, the children all of one mother, and we do not think it right to be one another's masters or servants;

but the natural equality of birth compels us to seek for legal equality, and to recognize no superiority except in the reputation of virtue and wisdom.

And so their and our fathers, and these, too, our brethren, being nobly born and having been brought up in all freedom, did both in their public and private capacity many noble deeds famous over the whole world. They were the deeds of men who thought that they ought to fight both against Hellenes for the sake of Hellenes on behalf of freedom, and against barbarians in the common interest of Hellas. Time would fail me to tell of their defence of their country against the invasion of Eumolpus and the Amazons, or of their defence of the Argives against the Cadmeians, or of the Heracleids against the Argives; besides, the poets have already declared in song to all mankind their glory, and therefore any commemoration of their deeds in prose which we might attempt would hold a second place. They already have their reward, and I say no more of them; but there are other worthy deeds of which no poet has worthily sung, and which are still wooing the poet's muse. Of these I am bound to make honourable mention, and shall invoke others to sing of them also in lyric and other strains, in a manner becoming the actors. And first I will tell how the Persians, lords of Asia, were enslaving Europe, and how the children of this land, who were our fathers, held them back. Of these I will speak first, and praise their valour, as is meet and fitting. He who would rightly estimate them should place himself in thought at that time, when the whole of Asia was subject to the third king of Persia. The first king, Cyrus, by his valour freed the Persians, who were his countrymen, and subjected the Medes, who were their lords, and he ruled over the rest of Asia, as far as Egypt; and after him came his son, who ruled all the accessible part of Egypt and Libya; the third king was Darius, who extended the land boundaries of the empire to Scythia, and with his fleet held the sea and the islands. None presumed to be his equal; the minds of all men were enthralled by him--so many and mighty and warlike nations had the power of Persia subdued. Now Darius had a quarrel against us and the Eretrians, because, as he said, we had conspired against Sardis, and he sent 500,000 men in transports and vessels of war, and 300 ships, and Datis as commander, telling him to bring the Eretrians and Athenians to the king, if he wished to keep his head on his shoulders. He sailed against the Eretrians, who were reputed to be amongst the noblest and most warlike of the Hellenes of that day, and they were numerous, but he conquered them all in three days; and when he had conquered them, in order that no one might escape, he searched the whole country after this manner: his soldiers, coming to the borders of Eretria and spreading from sea to sea, joined hands and passed through the whole country, in order that they might be able to tell the king that no one had escaped them. And from Eretria they went to Marathon with a like intention, expecting to bind the Athenians in the same yoke of necessity in which they had bound the Eretrians. Having effected one-half of their purpose, they were in the act of attempting the other, and none of the Hellenes dared to assist either the Eretrians or the Athenians, except the Lacedaemonians, and they arrived a day too

late for the battle; but the rest were panic-stricken and kept quiet, too happy in having escaped for a time. He who has present to his mind that conflict will know what manner of men they were who received the onset of the barbarians at Marathon, and chastened the pride of the whole of Asia, and by the victory which they gained over the barbarians first taught other men that the power of the Persians was not invincible, but that hosts of men and the multitude of riches alike yield to valour. And I assert that those men are the fathers not only of ourselves, but of our liberties and of the liberties of all who are on the continent, for that was the action to which the Hellenes looked back when they ventured to fight for their own safety in the battles which ensued: they became disciples of the men of Marathon. To them, therefore, I assign in my speech the first place, and the second to those who fought and conquered in the sea fights at Salamis and Artemisium; for of them, too, one might have many things to say--of the assaults which they endured by sea and land, and how they repelled them. I will mention only that act of theirs which appears to me to be the noblest, and which followed that of Marathon and came nearest to it; for the men of Marathon only showed the Hellenes that it was possible to ward off the barbarians by land, the many by the few; but there was no proof that they could be defeated by ships, and at sea the Persians retained the reputation of being invincible in numbers and wealth and skill and strength. This is the glory of the men who fought at sea, that they dispelled the second terror which had hitherto possessed the Hellenes, and so made the fear of numbers, whether of ships or men, to cease among them. And so the soldiers of Marathon and the sailors of Salamis became the schoolmasters of Hellas; the one teaching and habituating the Hellenes not to fear the barbarians at sea, and the others not to fear them by land. Third in order, for the number and valour of the combatants, and third in the salvation of Hellas, I place the battle of Plataea. And now the Lacedaemonians as well as the Athenians took part in the struggle; they were all united in this greatest and most terrible conflict of all; wherefore their virtues will be celebrated in times to come, as they are now celebrated by us. But at a later period many Hellenic tribes were still on the side of the barbarians, and there was a report that the great king was going to make a new attempt upon the Hellenes, and therefore justice requires that we should also make mention of those who crowned the previous work of our salvation, and drove and purged away all barbarians from the sea. These were the men who fought by sea at the river Eurymedon, and who went on the expedition to Cyprus, and who sailed to Egypt and divers other places; and they should be gratefully remembered by us, because they compelled the king in fear for himself to look to his own safety instead of plotting the destruction of Hellas.

And so the war against the barbarians was fought out to the end by the whole city on their own behalf, and on behalf of their countrymen. There was peace, and our city was held in honour; and then, as prosperity makes men jealous, there succeeded a jealousy of her, and jealousy begat envy, and so she became engaged against her will in a war with

the Hellenes. On the breaking out of war, our citizens met the Lacedaemonians at Tanagra, and fought for the freedom of the Boeotians; the issue was doubtful, and was decided by the engagement which followed. For when the Lacedaemonians had gone on their way, leaving the Boeotians, whom they were aiding, on the third day after the battle of Tanagra, our countrymen conquered at Oenophyta, and righteously restored those who had been unrighteously exiled. And they were the first after the Persian war who fought on behalf of liberty in aid of Hellenes against Hellenes; they were brave men, and freed those whom they aided, and were the first too who were honourably interred in this sepulchre by the state. Afterwards there was a mighty war, in which all the Hellenes joined, and devastated our country, which was very ungrateful of them; and our countrymen, after defeating them in a naval engagement and taking their leaders, the Spartans, at Sphagia, when they might have destroyed them, spared their lives, and gave them back, and made peace, considering that they should war with the fellow-countrymen only until they gained a victory over them, and not because of the private anger of the state destroy the common interest of Hellas; but that with barbarians they should war to the death. Worthy of praise are they also who waged this war, and are here interred; for they proved, if any one doubted the superior prowess of the Athenians in the former war with the barbarians, that their doubts had no foundation--showing by their victory in the civil war with Hellas, in which they subdued the other chief state of the Hellenes, that they could conquer single-handed those with whom they had been allied in the war against the barbarians. After the peace there followed a third war, which was of a terrible and desperate nature, and in this many brave men who are here interred lost their lives--many of them had won victories in Sicily, whither they had gone over the seas to fight for the liberties of the Leontines, to whom they were bound by oaths; but, owing to the distance, the city was unable to help them, and they lost heart and came to misfortune, their very enemies and opponents winning more renown for valour and temperance than the friends of others. Many also fell in naval engagements at the Hellespont, after having in one day taken all the ships of the enemy, and defeated them in other naval engagements. And what I call the terrible and desperate nature of the war, is that the other Hellenes, in their extreme animosity towards the city, should have entered into negotiations with their bitterest enemy, the king of Persia, whom they, together with us, had expelled;--him, without us, they again brought back, barbarian against Hellenes, and all the hosts, both of Hellenes and barbarians, were united against Athens. And then shone forth the power and valour of our city. Her enemies had supposed that she was exhausted by the war, and our ships were blockaded at Mitylene. But the citizens themselves embarked, and came to the rescue with sixty other ships, and their valour was confessed of all men, for they conquered their enemies and delivered their friends. And yet by some evil fortune they were left to perish at sea, and therefore are not interred here. Ever to be remembered and honoured are they, for by their valour not only that sea-fight was won for us, but the entire war was decided by them, and through them the city gained the reputation of being

invincible, even though attacked by all mankind. And that reputation was a true one, for the defeat which came upon us was our own doing. We were never conquered by others, and to this day we are still unconquered by them; but we were our own conquerors, and received defeat at our own hands. Afterwards there was quiet and peace abroad, but there sprang up war at home; and, if men are destined to have civil war, no one could have desired that his city should take the disorder in a milder form. How joyful and natural was the reconciliation of those who came from the Piraeus and those who came from the city; with what moderation did they order the war against the tyrants in Eleusis, and in a manner how unlike what the other Hellenes expected! And the reason of this gentleness was the veritable tie of blood, which created among them a friendship as of kinsmen, faithful not in word only, but in deed. And we ought also to remember those who then fell by one another's hands, and on such occasions as these to reconcile them with sacrifices and prayers, praying to those who have power over them, that they may be reconciled even as we are reconciled. For they did not attack one another out of malice or enmity, but they were unfortunate. And that such was the fact we ourselves are witnesses, who are of the same race with them, and have mutually received and granted forgiveness of what we have done and suffered. After this there was perfect peace, and the city had rest; and her feeling was that she forgave the barbarians, who had severely suffered at her hands and severely retaliated, but that she was indignant at the ingratitude of the Hellenes, when she remembered how they had received good from her and returned evil, having made common cause with the barbarians, depriving her of the ships which had once been their salvation, and dismantling our walls, which had preserved their own from falling. She thought that she would no longer defend the Hellenes, when enslaved either by one another or by the barbarians, and did accordingly. This was our feeling, while the Lacedaemonians were thinking that we who were the champions of liberty had fallen, and that their business was to subject the remaining Hellenes. And why should I say more? for the events of which I am speaking happened not long ago and we can all of us remember how the chief peoples of Hellas, Argives and Boeotians and Corinthians, came to feel the need of us, and, what is the greatest miracle of all, the Persian king himself was driven to such extremity as to come round to the opinion, that from this city, of which he was the destroyer, and from no other, his salvation would proceed.

And if a person desired to bring a deserved accusation against our city, he would find only one charge which he could justly urge--that she was too compassionate and too favourable to the weaker side. And in this instance she was not able to hold out or keep her resolution of refusing aid to her injurers when they were being enslaved, but she was softened, and did in fact send out aid, and delivered the Hellenes from slavery, and they were free until they afterwards enslaved themselves. Whereas, to the great king she refused to give the assistance of the state, for she could not forget the trophies of Marathon and Salamis and Plataea; but she allowed exiles and volunteers to assist him, and they were his salvation. And she herself, when she was compelled, entered into the

war, and built walls and ships, and fought with the Lacedaemonians on behalf of the Parians. Now the king fearing this city and wanting to stand aloof, when he saw the Lacedaemonians growing weary of the war at sea, asked of us, as the price of his alliance with us and the other allies, to give up the Hellenes in Asia, whom the Lacedaemonians had previously handed over to him, he thinking that we should refuse, and that then he might have a pretence for withdrawing from us. About the other allies he was mistaken, for the Corinthians and Argives and Boeotians, and the other states, were quite willing to let them go, and swore and covenanted, that, if he would pay them money, they would make over to him the Hellenes of the continent, and we alone refused to give them up and swear. Such was the natural nobility of this city, so sound and healthy was the spirit of freedom among us, and the instinctive dislike of the barbarian, because we are pure Hellenes, having no admixture of barbarism in us. For we are not like many others, descendants of Pelops or Cadmus or Egyptus or Danaus, who are by nature barbarians, and yet pass for Hellenes, and dwell in the midst of us; but we are pure Hellenes, uncontaminated by any foreign element, and therefore the hatred of the foreigner has passed unadulterated into the life-blood of the city. And so, notwithstanding our noble sentiments, we were again isolated, because we were unwilling to be guilty of the base and unholy act of giving up Hellenes to barbarians. And we were in the same case as when we were subdued before; but, by the favour of Heaven, we managed better, for we ended the war without the loss of our ships or walls or colonies; the enemy was only too glad to be quit of us. Yet in this war we lost many brave men, such as were those who fell owing to the ruggedness of the ground at the battle of Corinth, or by treason at Lechaenum. Brave men, too, were those who delivered the Persian king, and drove the Lacedaemonians from the sea. I remind you of them, and you must celebrate them together with me, and do honour to their memories.

Such were the actions of the men who are here interred, and of others who have died on behalf of their country; many and glorious things I have spoken of them, and there are yet many more and more glorious things remaining to be told--many days and nights would not suffice to tell of them. Let them not be forgotten, and let every man remind their descendants that they also are soldiers who must not desert the ranks of their ancestors, or from cowardice fall behind. Even as I exhort you this day, and in all future time, whenever I meet with any of you, shall continue to remind and exhort you, O ye sons of heroes, that you strive to be the bravest of men. And I think that I ought now to repeat what your fathers desired to have said to you who are their survivors, when they went out to battle, in case anything happened to them. I will tell you what I heard them say, and what, if they had only speech, they would fain be saying, judging from what they then said. And you must imagine that you hear them saying what I now repeat to you:--

'Sons, the event proves that your fathers were brave men; for we might have lived dishonourably, but have preferred to die honourably rather than bring you and your children into disgrace, and rather than

dishonour our own fathers and forefathers; considering that life is not life to one who is a dishonour to his race, and that to such a one neither men nor Gods are friendly, either while he is on the earth or after death in the world below. Remember our words, then, and whatever is your aim let virtue be the condition of the attainment of your aim, and know that without this all possessions and pursuits are dishonourable and evil. For neither does wealth bring honour to the owner, if he be a coward; of such a one the wealth belongs to another, and not to himself. Nor does beauty and strength of body, when dwelling in a base and cowardly man, appear comely, but the reverse of comely, making the possessor more conspicuous, and manifesting forth his cowardice. And all knowledge, when separated from justice and virtue, is seen to be cunning and not wisdom; wherefore make this your first and last and constant and all-absorbing aim, to exceed, if possible, not only us but all your ancestors in virtue; and know that to excel you in virtue only brings us shame, but that to be excelled by you is a source of happiness to us. And we shall most likely be defeated, and you will most likely be victors in the contest, if you learn so to order your lives as not to abuse or waste the reputation of your ancestors, knowing that to a man who has any self-respect, nothing is more dishonourable than to be honoured, not for his own sake, but on account of the reputation of his ancestors. The honour of parents is a fair and noble treasure to their posterity, but to have the use of a treasure of wealth and honour, and to leave none to your successors, because you have neither money nor reputation of your own, is alike base and dishonourable. And if you follow our precepts you will be received by us as friends, when the hour of destiny brings you hither; but if you neglect our words and are disgraced in your lives, no one will welcome or receive you. This is the message which is to be delivered to our children.

'Some of us have fathers and mothers still living, and we would urge them, if, as is likely, we shall die, to bear the calamity as lightly as possible, and not to condole with one another; for they have sorrows enough, and will not need any one to stir them up. While we gently heal their wounds, let us remind them that the Gods have heard the chief part of their prayers; for they prayed, not that their children might live for ever, but that they might be brave and renowned. And this, which is the greatest good, they have attained. A mortal man cannot expect to have everything in his own life turning out according to his will; and they, if they bear their misfortunes bravely, will be truly deemed brave fathers of the brave. But if they give way to their sorrows, either they will be suspected of not being our parents, or we of not being such as our panegyrists declare. Let not either of the two alternatives happen, but rather let them be our chief and true panegyrists, who show in their lives that they are true men, and had men for their sons. Of old the saying, "Nothing too much," appeared to be, and really was, well said. For he whose happiness rests with himself, if possible, wholly, and if not, as far as is possible,--who is not hanging in suspense on other men, or changing with the vicissitude of their fortune,--has his life

ordered for the best. He is the temperate and valiant and wise; and when his riches come and go, when his children are given and taken away, he will remember the proverb--"Neither rejoicing overmuch nor grieving overmuch," for he relies upon himself. And such we would have our parents to be--that is our word and wish, and as such we now offer ourselves, neither lamenting overmuch, nor fearing overmuch, if we are to die at this time. And we entreat our fathers and mothers to retain these feelings throughout their future life, and to be assured that they will not please us by sorrowing and lamenting over us. But, if the dead have any knowledge of the living, they will displease us most by making themselves miserable and by taking their misfortunes too much to heart, and they will please us best if they bear their loss lightly and temperately. For our life will have the noblest end which is vouchsafed to man, and should be glorified rather than lamented. And if they will direct their minds to the care and nurture of our wives and children, they will soonest forget their misfortunes, and live in a better and nobler way, and be dearer to us.

'This is all that we have to say to our families: and to the state we would say--Take care of our parents and of our sons: let her worthily cherish the old age of our parents, and bring up our sons in the right way. But we know that she will of her own accord take care of them, and does not need any exhortation of ours.'

This, O ye children and parents of the dead, is the message which they bid us deliver to you, and which I do deliver with the utmost seriousness. And in their name I beseech you, the children, to imitate your fathers, and you, parents, to be of good cheer about yourselves; for we will nourish your age, and take care of you both publicly and privately in any place in which one of us may meet one of you who are the parents of the dead. And the care of you which the city shows, you know yourselves; for she has made provision by law concerning the parents and children of those who die in war; the highest authority is specially entrusted with the duty of watching over them above all other citizens, and they will see that your fathers and mothers have no wrong done to them. The city herself shares in the education of the children, desiring as far as it is possible that their orphanhood may not be felt by them; while they are children she is a parent to them, and when they have arrived at man's estate she sends them to their several duties, in full armour clad; and bringing freshly to their minds the ways of their fathers, she places in their hands the instruments of their fathers' virtues; for the sake of the omen, she would have them from the first begin to rule over their own houses arrayed in the strength and arms of their fathers. And as for the dead, she never ceases honouring them, celebrating in common for all rites which become the property of each; and in addition to this, holding gymnastic and equestrian contests, and musical festivals of every sort. She is to the dead in the place of a son and heir, and to their sons in the place of a father, and to their parents and elder kindred in the place of a guardian--ever and always caring for them. Considering this, you ought to bear your calamity the

more gently; for thus you will be most endeared to the dead and to the living, and your sorrows will heal and be healed. And now do you and all, having lamented the dead in common according to the law, go your ways.

You have heard, Menexenus, the oration of Aspasia the Milesian.

MENEXENUS: Truly, Socrates, I marvel that Aspasia, who is only a woman, should be able to compose such a speech; she must be a rare one.

SOCRATES: Well, if you are incredulous, you may come with me and hear her.

MENEXENUS: I have often met Aspasia, Socrates, and know what she is like.

SOCRATES: Well, and do you not admire her, and are you not grateful for her speech?

MENEXENUS: Yes, Socrates, I am very grateful to her or to him who told you, and still more to you who have told me.

SOCRATES: Very good. But you must take care not to tell of me, and then at some future time I will repeat to you many other excellent political speeches of hers.

MENEXENUS: Fear not, only let me hear them, and I will keep the secret.

SOCRATES: Then I will keep my promise.



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EDWARD THE SECOND

By Christopher Marlowe

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

KING EDWARD THE SECOND.

PRINCE EDWARD, _his son, afterwards_ KING EDWARD THE THIRD.

KENT, _brother to_ KING EDWARD THE SECOND.

GAVESTON.

ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

BISHOP OF COVENTRY.

BISHOP OF WINCHESTER.

WARWICK.

LANCASTER.

PEMBROKE.

ARUNDER.

LEICESTER.

BERKELEY.

MORTIMER _the elder._

MORTIMER _the younger, his nephew._

SPENSER _the elder._

SPENSER _the younger, his son._

BALDOCK.

BAUMONT.

TRUSSEL.

GURNEY.

MATREVIS.

LIGHTBORN.

SIR JOHN OF HAINAULT.

LEVUNE.

RICE AP HOWEL.

ABBOT.

MONKS.

HERALD.

LORDS, POOR MEN, JAMES, MOWER, CHAMPION,

MESSENGERS, SOLDIERS, _and_ ATTENDANTS.

QUEEN ISABELLA, _wife to_ KING EDWARD THE SECOND.

NIECE _to_ KING EDWARD THE SECOND, _daughter to
the _DUKE OF GLOCESTER._

LADIES.

Enter GAVESTON, _reading a letter._

_Gav. My father is deceas'd. Come, Gaveston,
And share the kingdom with thy dearest friend._
Ah, words that make me surfeit with delight!
What greater bliss can hap to Gaveston
Than live and be the favourite of a king!
Sweet prince, I come! these, thy amorous lines
Might have enforc'd me to have swum from France,
And, like Leander, gasp'd upon the sand,
So thou wouldst smile, and take me in thine arms.
The sight of London to my exil'd eyes
Is as Elysium to a new-come soul:
Not that I love the city or the men,
But that it harbours him I hold so dear,--
The king, upon whose bosom let me lie,
And with the world be still at enmity.
What need the arctic people love star-light,
To whom the sun shines both by day and night?
Farewell base stooping to the lordly peers!
My knee shall bow to none but to the king.
As for the multitude, that are but sparks,
Rak'd up in embers of their poverty,--
_Tanti,--I'll fawn first on the wind,
That glanceth at my lips, and flieth away.

Enter three Poor Men.

But how now! what are these?
Poor Men. Such as desire your worship's service.
Gav. What canst thou do?
First P. Man. I can ride.
Gav. But I have no horse.--What art thou?
Sec. P. Man. A traveller.
Gav. Let me see; thou wouldst do well
To wait at my trencher, and tell me lies at dinner-time;
And, as I like your discoursing, I'll have you.--
And what art thou?
Third P. Man. A soldier, that hath serv'd against the Scot.
Gav. Why, there are hospitals for such as you:
I have no war; and therefore, sir, be gone.
Third P. Man. Farewell, and perish by a soldier's hand,
That wouldst reward them with an hospital!
Gav. Ay, ay, these words of his move me as much
As if a goose should play the porcupine,
And dart her plumes, thinking to pierce my breast.
But yet it is no pain to speak men fair;
I'll flatter these, and make them live in hope.-- [_Aside._

You know that I came lately out of France,
And yet I have not view'd my lord the king:
If I speed well, I'll entertain you all.

All. We thank your worship.

Gav. I have some business: leave me to myself.

All. We will wait here about the court.

Gav. Do. [_Exeunt Poor Men._

These are not men for me;
I must have wanton poets, pleasant wits,
Musicians, that with touching of a string
May draw the pliant king which way I please:
Music and poetry is his delight;
Therefore I'll have Italian masks by night,
Sweet speeches, comedies, and pleasing shows;
And in the day, when he shall walk abroad,
Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad;
My men, like satyrs grazing on the lawns,
Shall with their goat-feet dance the antic hay;
Sometime a lovely boy in Dian's shape,
With hair that gilds the water as it glides
Crownets of pearl about his naked arms,
And in his sportful hands an olive-tree,
To hide those parts which men delight to see,
Shall bathe him in a spring; and there, hard by,
One like Actæon, peeping through the grove,
Shall by the angry goddess be transform'd,
And running in the likeness of an hart,
By yelping hounds pull'd down, shall seem to die:
Such things as these best please his majesty.--
Here comes my lord the king, and the nobles,
From the parliament. I'll stand aside.

[_Retires._

Enter KING EDWARD, KENT, LANCASTER, _the elder_ MORTIMER,
the younger MORTIMER, WARWICK, PEMBROKE, _and_
Attendants.

K. Edw. Lancaster!

Lan. My lord?

Gav. That Earl of Lancaster do I abhor. [_Aside._

K. Edw. Will you not grant me this?--In spite of them

I'll have my will; and these two Mortimers,

That cross me thus, shall know I am displeased. [_Aside._

E. Mor. If you love us, my lord, hate Gaveston.

Gav. That villain Mortimer! I'll be his death. [_Aside._

Y. Mor. Mine uncle here, this earl, and I myself,

Were sworn to your father at his death,

That he should ne'er return into the realm:

And now, my lord, ere I will break my oath,

This sword of mine, that should offend your foes,

Shall sleep within the scabbard at thy need,

And underneath thy banners march who will,
 For Mortimer will hang his armour up.
 Gav. Mort dieu! [_Aside._
 K. Edw. Well, Mortimer, I'll make thee rue these words:
 Beseems it thee to contradict thy king?
 Frown'st thou thereat, aspiring Lancaster?
 The sword shall plane the furrows of thy brows,
 And hew these knees that now are grown so stiff.
 I will have Gaveston; and you shall know
 What danger 'tis to stand against your king.
 Gav. Well done, Ned! [_Aside._
 Lan. My lord, why do you thus incense your peers,
 That naturally would love and honour you,
 But for that base and obscure Gaveston?
 Four earldoms have I, besides Lancaster,--
 Derby, Salisbury, Lincoln, Leicester;
 These will I sell, to give my soldiers pay,
 Ere Gaveston shall stay within the realm:
 Therefore, if he be come, expel him straight.
 Kent. Barons and earls, your pride hath made me mute;
 But know I'll speak, and to the proof, I hope.
 I do remember, in my father's days,
 Lord Percy of the North, being highly mov'd,
 Brav'd Mowbray in presence of the king;
 For which, had not his highness lov'd him well,
 He should have lost his head; but with his look
 Th' undaunted spirit of Percy was appeas'd,
 And Mowbray and he were reconcil'd:
 Yet dare you brave the king unto his face.--
 Brother, revenge it, and let these their heads
 Preach upon poles, for trespass of their tongues.
 War. O, our heads!
 K. Edw. Ay, yours; and therefore I would wish you grant.
 War. Bridle thy anger, gentle Mortimer.
 Y. Mor. I cannot, nor I will not; I must speak.--
 Cousin, our hands I hope shall fence our heads,
 And strike off his that makes you threaten us.--
 Come, uncle, let us leave the brain-sick king,
 And henceforth parley with our naked swords.
 E. Mor. Wiltshire hath men enough to save our heads.
 War. All Warwickshire will leave him for my sake.
 Lan. And northward Lancaster hath many friends.--
 Adieu, my lord; and either change your mind,
 Or look to see the throne, where you should sit,
 To float in blood, and at thy wanton head
 The glozing head of thy base minion thrown.
 [_Exeunt all except King Edward, Kent, Gaveston,
 and attendants._
 K. Edw. I cannot brook these haughty menaces:
 Am I a king, and must be over-rul'd!--

Brother, display my ensigns in the field:
I'll bandy with the barons and the earls,
And either die or live with Gaveston.

Gav. I can no longer keep me from my lord. [_Comes forward.]

K. Edw. What, Gaveston! welcome! Kiss not my hand:

Embrace me, Gaveston, as I do thee.

Why shouldst thou kneel? know'st thou not who I am?

Thy friend, thyself, another Gaveston:

Not Hylas was more mourned for of Hercules

Than thou hast been of me since thy exile.

Gav. And, since I went from hence, no soul in hell

Hath felt more torment than poor Gaveston.

K. Edw. I know it.--Brother, welcome home my friend.--

Now let the treacherous Mortimers conspire,

And that high-minded Earl of Lancaster:

I have my wish, in that I joy thy sight;

And sooner shall the sea o'erwhelm my land

Than bear the ship that shall transport thee hence.

I here create thee Lord High-chamberlain,

Chief Secretary to the state and me,

Earl of Cornwall, King and Lord of Man.

Gav. My lord, these titles far exceed my worth.

Kent. Brother, the least of these may well suffice

For one of greater birth than Gaveston.

K. Edw. Cease, brother, for I cannot brook these words.--

Thy worth, sweet friend, is far above my gifts:

Therefore, to equal it, receive my heart.

If for these dignities thou be envied,

I'll give thee more; for, but to honour thee,

Is Edward pleas'd with kingly regiment.

Fear'st thou thy person? thou shalt have a guard:

Wantest thou gold? go to my treasury:

Wouldst thou be lov'd and fear'd? receive my seal,

Save or condemn, and in our name command

What so thy mind affects, or fancy likes.

Gav. It shall suffice me to enjoy your love;

Which whiles I have, I think myself as great

As Cæsar riding in the Roman street,

With captive kings at his triumphant car.

Enter the BISHOP OF COVENTRY.

K. Edw. Whither goes my Lord of Coventry so fast?

Bish. of Cov. To celebrate your father's exequies.

But is that wicked Gaveston return'd?

K. Edw. Ay, priest, and lives to be reveng'd on thee,

That wert the only cause of his exile.

Gav. 'Tis true; and, but for reverence of these robes,

Thou shouldst not plod one foot beyond this place.

Bish. of Cov. I did no more than I was bound to do:

And, Gaveston, unless thou be reclaim'd,
 As then I did incense the parliament,
 So will I now, and thou shalt back to France.
 Gav. Saving your reverence, you must pardon me.
 K. Edw. Throw off his golden mitre, rend his stole,
 And in the channel christen him anew.
 Kent. Ay, brother, lay not violent hands on him!
 For he'll complain unto the see of Rome.
 Gav. Let him complain unto the see of hell:
 I'll be reveng'd on him for my exile.
 K. Edw. No, spare his life, but seize upon his goods:
 Be thou lord bishop, and receive his rents,
 And make him serve thee as thy chaplain:
 I give him thee; here, use him as thou wilt.
 Gav. He shall to prison, and there die in bolts.
 K. Edw. Ay, to the Tower, the Fleet, or where thou wilt.
 Bish. of Cov. For this offence be thou accurs'd of God!
 K. Edw. Who's there? Convey this priest to the Tower.
 Bish. of Cov. True, true.
 K. Edw. But, in the meantime, Gaveston, away,
 And take possession of his house and goods.
 Come, follow me, and thou shalt have my guard
 To see it done, and bring thee safe again.
 Gav. What should a priest do with so fair a house?
 A prison may besem his holiness. [_Exeunt._

 Enter, on one side, the elder MORTIMER, _and the younger_
 MORTIMER; _on the other, _ WARWICK, _and_ LANCASTER.

 War. 'Tis true, the bishop is in the Tower,
 And goods and body given to Gaveston.
 Lan. What, will they tyrannise upon the church?
 Ah, wicked King! accursed Gaveston!
 This ground, which is corrupted with their steps,
 Shall be their timeless sepulchre or mine.
 Y. Mor. Well, let that peevish Frenchman guard him sure;
 Unless his breast be sword-proof, he shall die.
 E. Mor. How now! why droops the Earl of Lancaster?
 Y. Mor. Wherefore is Guy of Warwick discontent?
 Lan. That villain Gaveston is made an earl.
 E. Mor. An earl!
 War. Ay, and besides Lord-chamberlain of the realm,
 And Secretary too, and Lord of Man.
 E. Mor. We may not nor we will not suffer this.
 Y. Mor. Why post we not from hence to levy men?
 Lan. "My Lord of Cornwall" now at every word;
 And happy is the man whom he vouchsafes,
 For vailing of his bonnet, one good look.
 Thus, arm in arm, the king and he doth march:
 Nay, more, the guard upon his lordship waits,

And all the court begins to flatter him.
War. Thus leaning on the shoulder of the king,
He nods, and scorns, and smiles at those that pass.
E. Mor. Doth no man take exceptions at the slave?
Lan. All stomach him, but none dare speak a word.
Y. Mor. Ah, that bewrays their baseness, Lancaster!
Were all the earls and barons of my mind,
We'd hale him from the bosom of the king,
And at the court-gate hang the peasant up,
Who, swoln with venom of ambitious pride,
Will be the ruin of the realm and us.
War. Here comes my Lord of Canterbury's grace.
Lan. His countenance bewrays he is displeas'd.

Enter the ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, _and an_ Attendant.

Archb. of Cant. First, were his sacred garments rent and torn;
Then laid they violent hands upon him; next,
Himself imprison'd, and his goods asseiz'd:
This certify the Pope: away, take horse. [_Exit Attendant._]
Lan. My lord, will you take arms against the king?
Archb. of Cant. What need I? God himself is up in arms
When violence is offer'd to the church.
Y. Mor. Then will you join with us, that be his peers,
To banish or behead that Gaveston?
Archb. of Cant. What else, my lords? for it concerns me near;
The bishoprick of Coventry is his.

Enter QUEEN ISABELLA.

Y. Mor. Madam, whither walks your majesty so fast?
Q. Isab. Unto the forest, gentle Mortimer,
To live in grief and baleful discontent;
For now my lord the king regards me not,
But dotes upon the love of Gaveston:
He claps his cheeks, and hangs about his neck,
Smiles in his face, and whispers in his ears;
And, when I come, he frowns, as who should say,
"Go whither thou wilt, seeing I have Gaveston."
E. Mor. Is it not strange that he is thus bewitch'd?
Y. Mor. Madam, return unto the court again:
That sly inveigling Frenchman we'll exile,
Or lose our lives; and yet, ere that day come,
The king shall lose his crown; for we have power,
And courage too, to be reveng'd at full.
Archb. of Cant. But yet lift not your swords against the king.
Lan. No; but we will lift Gaveston from hence.
War. And war must be the means, or he'll stay still.

Q. Isab. Then let him stay; for, rather than my lord
Shall be oppress'd with civil mutinies,
I will endure a melancholy life,
And let him frolic with his minion.
Archb. of Cant. My lords, to ease all this, but hear me speak:
We and the rest, that are his counsellors,
Will meet, and with a general consent
Confirm his banishment with our hands and seals.
Lan. What we confirm the king will frustrate.
Y. Mor. Then may we lawfully revolt from him.
War. But say, my lord, where shall this meeting be?
Archb. of Cant. At the New Temple.
Y. Mor. Content.
Archb. of Cant. And, in the meantime, I'll entreat you all
To cross to Lambeth, and there stay with me.
Lan. Come, then, let's away.
Y. Mor. Madam, farewell.
Q. Isab. Farewell, sweet Mortimer, and, for my sake,
Forbear to levy arms against the king.
Y. Mor. Ay, if words will serve; if not, I must. [_Exeunt._]

Enter GAVESTON _and_ KENT.

Gav. Edmund, the mighty prince of Lancaster,
That hath more earldoms than an ass can bear,
And both the Mortimers, two goodly men,
With Guy of Warwick, that redoubted knight,
Are gone towards Lambeth: there let them remain. [_Exeunt._]

Enter LANCASTER, WARWICK, PEMBROKE, _the elder_
MORTIMER, _the younger_ MORTIMER, _the_ ARCHBISHOP
OF CANTERBURY, _and_ Attendants.

Lan. Here is the form of Gaveston's exile;
May it please your lordship to subscribe your name.
Archb. of Cant. Give me the paper.
[_He subscribes, as the others do after him._]
Lan. Quick, quick, my lord; I long to write my name.
War. But I long more to see him banish'd hence.
Y. Mor. The name of Mortimer shall fright the king,
Unless he be declin'd from that base peasant.

Enter KING EDWARD, GAVESTON, _and_ KENT.

K. Edw. What, are you mov'd that Gaveston sits here?
It is our pleasure; we will have it so.
Lan. Your grace doth well to place him by your side,
For nowhere else the new earl is so safe.
E. Mor. What man of noble birth can brook this sight?
Quam male conveniunt!--

See, what a scornful look the peasant casts!
 Pem. Can kingly lions fawn on creeping ants?
 War. Ignoble vassal, that, like Phaeton,
 Aspir'st unto the guidance of the sun!
 Y. Mor. Their downfall is at hand, their forces down:
 We will not thus be fac'd and over-peer'd.
 K. Edw. Lay hands on that traitor Mortimer!
 E. Mor. Lay hands on that traitor Gaveston!
 Kent. Is this the duty that you owe your king?
 War. We know our duties; let him know his peers.
 K. Edw. Whither will you bear him? stay, or ye shall die.
 E. Mor. We are no traitors; therefore threaten not.
 Gav. No, threaten not, my lord, but pay them home.
 Were I a king--
 Y. Mor. Thou, villain! wherefore talk'st thou of a king,
 That hardly art a gentleman by birth?
 K. Edw. Were he a peasant, being my minion,
 I'll make the proudest of you stoop to him.
 Lan. My lord--you may not thus disparage us.--
 Away, I say, with hateful Gaveston!
 E. Mor. And with the Earl of Kent that favours him.
 [_Attendants remove Gaveston and Kent._]
 K. Edw. Nay, then, lay violent hands upon your king:
 Here, Mortimer, sit thou in Edward's throne;
 Warwick and Lancaster, wear you my crown.
 Was ever king thus over-rul'd as I?
 Lan. Learn, then, to rule us better, and the realm.
 Y. Mor. What we have done, our heart-blood shall maintain.
 War. Think you that we can brook this upstart[s] pride?
 K. Edw. Anger and wrathful fury stops my speech.
 Archb. of Cant. Why are you not mov'd? be patient, my lord,
 And see what we your counsellors have done.
 Y. Mor. My lords, now let us all be resolute,
 And either have our wills, or lose our lives.
 K. Edw. Meet you for this, proud over-daring peers!
 Ere my sweet Gaveston shall part from me,
 This isle shall fleet upon the ocean,
 And wander to the unfrequented Inde.
 Archb. of Cant. You know that I am legate to the Pope:
 On your allegiance to the see of Rome,
 Subscribe, as we have done, to his exile.
 Y. Mor. Curse him, if he refuse; and then may we
 Depose him, and elect another king.
 K. Edw. Ay, there it goes! but yet I will not yield:
 Curse me, depose me, do the worst you can.
 Lan. Then linger not, my lord, but do it straight.
 Archb. of Cant. Remember how the bishop was abus'd:
 Either banish him that was the cause thereof,
 Or I will presently discharge these lords
 Of duty and allegiance due to thee.

K. Edw. It boots me not to threat; I must speak fair:
 The legate of the Pope will be obey'd.-- [_Aside._
 My lord, you shall be Chancellor of the realm;
 Thou, Lancaster, High-Admiral of our fleet;
 Young Mortimer and his uncle shall be earls;
 And you, Lord Warwick, President of the North;
 And thou of Wales. If this content you not,
 Make several kingdoms of this monarchy,
 And share it equally amongst you all,
 So I may have some nook or corner left,
 To frolic with my dearest Gaveston.
 Archb. of Cant. Nothing shall alter us; we are resolv'd.
 Lan. Come, come, subscribe.
 Y. Mor. Why should you love him whom the world hates so?
 K. Edw. Because he loves me more than all the world.
 Ah, none but rude and savage-minded men
 Would seek the ruin of my Gaveston!
 You that be noble-born should pity him.
 War. You that are princely-born should shake him off:
 For shame, subscribe, and let the lown depart.
 E. Mor. Urge him, my lord.
 Archb. of Cant. Are you content to banish him the realm?
 K. Edw. I see I must, and therefore am content:
 Instead of ink, I'll write it with my tears. [_Subscribes._
 Y. Mor. The king is love-sick for his minion.
 K. Edw. 'Tis done: and now, accursed hand, fall off!
 Lan. Give it me: I'll have it publish'd in the streets.
 Y. Mor. I'll see him presently despatch'd away.
 Archb. of Cant. Now is my heart at ease.
 War. And so is mine.
 Pem. This will be good news to the common sort.
 E. Mor. Be it or no, he shall not linger here.
 [_Exeunt all except King Edward._
 K. Edw. How fast they run to banish him I love!
 They would not stir, were it to do me good.
 Why should a king be subject to a priest?
 Proud Rome, that hatchest such imperial grooms,
 With these thy superstitious taper-lights,
 Wherewith thy antichristian churches blaze,
 I'll fire thy crazed buildings, and enforce
 The papal towers to kiss the lowly ground,
 With slaughter'd priests make Tiber's channel swell,
 And banks rais'd higher with their sepulchres!
 As for the peers, that back the clergy thus,
 If I be king, not one of them shall live.

Re-enter GAVESTON.

Gav. My lord, I hear it whisper'd everywhere,
 That I am banish'd and must fly the land.

K. Edw. 'Tis true, sweet Gaveston: O were it false!
The legate of the Pope will have it so,
And thou must hence, or I shall be depos'd.
But I will reign to be reveng'd of them;
And therefore, sweet friend, take it patiently.
Live where thou wilt, I'll send thee gold enough;
And long thou shalt not stay; or, if thou dost,
I'll come to thee; my love shall ne'er decline.
Gav. Is all my hope turn'd to this hell of grief?
K. Edw. Rend not my heart with thy too-piercing words:
Thou from this land, I from myself am banish'd.
Gav. To go from hence grieves not poor Gaveston;
But to forsake you, in whose gracious looks
The blessedness of Gaveston remains;
For nowhere else seeks he felicity.
K. Edw. And only this torments my wretched soul,
That, whether I will or no, thou must depart.
Be governor of Ireland in my stead,
And there abide till fortune call thee home.
Here, take my picture, and let me wear thine:
[_They exchange pictures._
O, might I keep thee here, as I do this,
Happy were I! but now most miserable.
Gav. 'Tis something to be pitied of a king.
K. Edw. Thou shalt not hence; I'll hide thee, Gaveston.
Gav. I shall be found, and then 'twill grieve me more.
K. Edw. Kind words and mutual talk makes our grief greater:
Therefore, with dumb embracement, let us part,
Stay, Gaveston; I cannot leave thee thus.
Gav. For every look, my love drops down a tear:
Seeing I must go, do not renew my sorrow.
K. Edw. The time is little that thou hast to stay,
And, therefore, give me leave to look my fill.
But, come, sweet friend; I'll bear thee on thy way.
Gav. The peers will frown.
K. Edw. I pass not for their anger. Come, let's go:
O, that we might as well return as go!

Enter QUEEN ISABELLA.

Q. Isab. Whither goes my lord?
K. Edw. Fawn not on me, French strumpet; get thee gone!
Q. Isab. On whom but on my husband should I fawn?
Gav. On Mortimer; with whom, ungentle queen,--
I judge no more--judge you the rest, my lord.
Q. Isab. In saying this, thou wrong'st me, Gaveston:
Is't not enough that thou corrupt'st my lord,
And art a bawd to his affections,
But thou must call mine honour thus in question?
Gav. I mean not so; your grace must pardon me.

K. Edw. Thou art too familiar with that Mortimer,
 And by thy means is Gaveston exil'd:
 But I would wish thee reconcile the lords,
 Or thou shalt ne'er be reconcil'd to me.

Q. Isab. Your highness knows, it lies not in my power.

K. Edw. Away, then! touch me not.--Come, Gaveston.

Q. Isab. Villain, 'tis thou that robb'st me of my lord.

Gav. Madam, 'tis you that rob me of my lord.

K. Edw. Speak not unto her: let her droop and pine.

Q. Isab. Wherein, my lord, have I deserv'd these words?
 Witness the tears that Isabella sheds,
 Witness this heart, that, sighing for thee, breaks,
 How dear my lord is to poor Isabel!

K. Edw. And witness heaven how dear thou art to me:
 There weep; for, till my Gaveston be repeal'd,
 Assure thyself thou com'st not in my sight.
 [_Exeunt King Edward and Gaveston._]

Q. Isab. O miserable and distressed queen!
 Would, when I left sweet France, and was embarked,
 That charming Circe, walking on the waves,
 Had chang'd my shape! or at the marriage-day
 The cup of Hymen had been full of poison!
 Or with those arms, that twin'd about my neck,
 I had been stifled, and not liv'd to see
 The king my lord thus to abandon me!
 Like frantic Juno, will I fill the earth
 With ghastly murmur of my sighs and cries;
 For never doted Jove on Ganymede
 So much as he on cursed Gaveston:
 But that will more exasperate his wrath;
 I must entreat him, I must speak him fair,
 And be a means to call home Gaveston:
 And yet he'll ever dote on Gaveston;
 And so am I for ever miserable.

Re-enter LANCASTER, WARWICK, PEMBROKE, _the elder_
 MORTIMER, _and the younger_ MORTIMER.

Lan. Look, where the sister of the king of France
 Sits wringing of her hands and beats her breast!

War. The king, I fear, hath ill-treated her.

Pem. Hard is the heart that injures such a saint.

Y. Mor. I know 'tis 'long of Gaveston she weeps.

E. Mor. Why, he is gone.

Y. Mor. Madam, how fares your grace?

Q. Isab. Ah, Mortimer, now breaks the king's hate forth,
 And he confesseth that he loves me not!

Y. Mor. Cry quittance, madam, then, and love not him.

Q. Isab. No, rather will I die a thousand deaths:
 And yet I love in vain; he'll ne'er love me.

Lan. Fear ye not, madam; now his minion's gone,
 His wanton humour will be quickly left.
 Q. Isab. O, never, Lancaster! I am enjoin'd,
 To sue unto you all for his repeal:
 This wills my lord, and this must I perform,
 Or else be banish'd from his highness' presence.
 Lan. For his repeal, madam! he comes not back,
 Unless the sea cast up his shipwreck'd body.
 War. And to behold so sweet a sight as that,
 There's none here but would run his horse to death.
 Y. Mor. But, madam, would you have us call him home?
 Q. Isab. Ay, Mortimer, for, till he be restor'd,
 The angry king hath banish'd me the court;
 And, therefore, as thou lov'st and tender'st me,
 Be thou my advocate unto these peers.
 Y. Mor. What, would you have me plead for Gaveston?
 E. Mor. Plead for him that will, I am resolv'd.
 Lan. And so am I, my lord: dissuade the queen.
 Q. Isab. O, Lancaster, let him dissuade the king!
 For 'tis against my will he should return.
 War. Then speak not for him; let the peasant go.
 Q. Isab. 'Tis for myself I speak, and not for him.
 Pem. No speaking will prevail; and therefore cease.
 Y. Mor. Fair queen, forbear to angle for the fish
 Which, being caught, strikes him that takes it dead;
 I mean that vile torpedo, Gaveston,
 That now, I hope, floats on the Irish seas.
 Q. Isab. Sweet Mortimer, sit down by me a while,
 And I will tell thee reasons of such weight
 As thou wilt soon subscribe to his repeal.
 Y. Mor. It is impossible: but speak your mind.
 Q. Isab. Then, thus;--but none shall hear it but ourselves.
 [_Talks to Y. Mor. apart._
 Lan. My lords, albeit the queen win Mortimer,
 Will you be resolute and hold with me?
 E. Mor. Not I, against my nephew.
 Pem. Fear not; the queen's words cannot alter him.
 War. No? do but mark how earnestly she pleads!
 Lan. And see how coldly his looks make denial!
 War. She smiles: now, for my life, his mind is chang'd!
 Lan. I'll rather lose his friendship, I, than grant.
 Y. Mor. Well, of necessity it must be so.--
 My lords, that I abhor base Gaveston
 I hope your honours make no question.
 And therefore, though I plead for his repeal,
 'Tis not for his sake, but to our avail;
 Nay, for the realm's behoof, and for the king's.
 Lan. Fie, Mortimer, dishonour not thyself!
 Can this be true, 'twas good to banish him?
 And is this true, to call him home again?

Such reasons make white black, and dark night day.

Y. Mor. My Lord of Lancaster, mark the respect.

Lan. In no respect can contraries be true.

Q. Isab. Yet, good my lord, hear what he can allege.

War. All that he speaks is nothing; we are resolv'd.

Y. Mor. Do you not wish that Gaveston were dead?

Pem. I would he were!

Y. Mor. Why, then, my lord, give me but leave to speak.

E. Mor. But, nephew, do not play the sophister.

Y. Mor. This which I urge is of a burning zeal
 To mend the king and do our country good.
 Know you not Gaveston hath store of gold,
 Which may in Ireland purchase him such friends
 As he will front the mightiest of us all?
 And whereas he shall live and be belov'd,
 'Tis hard for us to work his overthrow.

War. Mark you but that, my lord of Lancaster.

Y. Mor. But, were he here, detested as he is,
 How easily might some base slave be suborn'd
 To greet his lordship with a poniard,
 And none so much as blame the murderer,
 But rather praise him for that brave attempt,
 And in the chronicle enrol his name
 For purging of the realm of such a plague!

Pem. He saith true.

Lan. Ay, but how chance this was not done before?

Y. Mor. Because, my lords, it was not thought upon.
 Nay, more, when he shall know it lies in us
 To banish him, and then to call him home,
 'Twill make him vail the top flag of his pride,
 And fear to offend the meanest nobleman.

E. Mor. But how if he do not, nephew?

Y. Mor. Then may we with some colour rise in arms;
 For, howsoever we have borne it out,
 'Tis treason to be up against the king;
 So shall we have the people of our side,
 Which, for his father's sake, lean to the king,
 But cannot brook a night-grown mushroom,
 Such a one as my Lord of Cornwall is,
 Should bear us down of the nobility:
 And, when the commons and the nobles join,
 'Tis not the king can buckler Gaveston;
 We'll pull him from the strongest hold he hath.
 My lords, if to perform this I be slack,
 Think me as base a groom as Gaveston.

Lan. On that condition Lancaster will grant.

War. And so will Pembroke and I.

E. Mor. And I.

Y. Mor. In this I count me highly gratified,
 And Mortimer will rest at your command.

Q. Isab. And when this favour Isabel forgets,
Then let her live abandon'd and forlorn.--
But see, in happy time, my lord the king,
Having brought the Earl of Cornwall on his way,
Is new return'd. This news will glad him much:
Yet not so much as me; I love him more
Than he can Gaveston: would he lov'd me
But half so much! then were I treble-blest.

Re-enter KING EDWARD, _mourning._

K. Edw. He's gone, and for his absence thus I mourn:
Did never sorrow go so near my heart
As doth the want of my sweet Gaveston;
And, could my crown's revenue bring him back,
I would freely give it to his enemies,
And think I gain'd, having bought so dear a friend.

Q. Isab. Hark, how he harps upon his minion!

K. Edw. My heart is as an anvil unto sorrow,
Which beats upon it like the Cyclops' hammers,
And with the noise turns up my giddy brain,
And makes me frantic for my Gaveston.
Ah, had some bloodless Fury rose from hell,
And with my kingly sceptre struck me dead,
When I was forc'd to leave my Gaveston!

Lan. Diablo, what passions call you these?

Q. Isab. My gracious lord, I come to bring you news.

K. Edw. That you have parled with your Mortimer?

Q. Isab. That Gaveston, my lord, shall be repeal'd.

K. Edw. Repeal'd! the news is too sweet to be true.

Q. Isab. But will you love me, if you find it so?

K. Edw. If it be so, what will not Edward do?

Q. Isab. For Gaveston, but not for Isabel.

K. Edw. For thee, fair queen, if thou lov'st Gaveston;
I'll hang a golden tongue about thy neck,
Seeing thou hast pleaded with so good success.

Q. Isab. No other jewels hang about my neck
Than these, my lord; nor let me have more wealth
Than I may fetch from this rich treasury.
O, how a kiss revives poor Isabel!

K. Edw. Once more receive my hand; and let this be
A second marriage 'twixt thyself and me.

Q. Isab. And may it prove more happy than the first!
My gentle lord, bespeak these nobles fair,
That wait attendance for a gracious look,
And on their knees salute your majesty.

K. Edw. Courageous Lancaster, embrace thy king;
And, as gross vapours perish by the sun,
Even so let hatred with thy sovereign's smile:
Live thou with me as my companion.

Lan. This salutation overjoys my heart.
 K. Edw. Warwick shall be my chiefest counsellor:
 These silver hairs will more adorn my court
 Than gaudy silks or rich embroidery.
 Chide me, sweet Warwick, if I go astray.
 War. Slay me, my lord, when I offend your grace.
 K. Edw. In solemn triumphs and in public shows
 Pembroke shall bear the sword before the king.
 Pem. And with this sword Pembroke will fight for you.
 K. Edw. But wherefore walks young Mortimer aside?
 Be thou commander of our royal fleet;
 Or, if that lofty office like thee not,
 I make thee here Lord Marshal of the realm.
 Y. Mor. My lord, I'll marshal so your enemies,
 As England shall be quiet, and you safe.
 K. Edw. And as for you, Lord Mortimer of Chirke,
 Whose great achievements in our foreign war
 Deserve no common place nor mean reward,
 Be you the general of the levied troops
 That now are ready to assail the Scots.
 E. Mor. In this your grace hath highly honour'd me,
 For with my nature war doth best agree.
 Q. Isab. Now is the king of England rich and strong,
 Having the love of his renowned peers.
 K. Edw. Ay, Isabel, ne'er was my heart so light.--
 Clerk of the crown, direct our warrant forth,
 For Gaveston, to Ireland!

Enter BEAUMONT _with warrant._

Beaumont, fly
 As fast as Iris or Jove's Mercury.
 Beau. It shall be done, my gracious lord. [_Exit._
 K. Edw. Lord Mortimer, we leave you to your charge.
 Now let us in, and feast it royally.
 Against our friend the Earl of Cornwall comes
 We'll have a general tilt and tournament;
 And then his marriage shall be solemniz'd;
 For wot you not that I have made him sure
 Unto our cousin, the Earl of Gloucester's heir?
 Lan. Such news we hear, my lord.
 K. Edw. That day, if not for him, yet for my sake,
 Who in the triumph will be challenger,
 Spare for no cost; we will requite your love.
 War. In this or aught your highness shall command us.
 K. Edw. Thanks, gentle Warwick. Come, lets in and revel.
 [_Exeunt all except the elder Mortimer and the
 younger Mortimer._
 E. Mor. Nephew, I must to Scotland; thou stay'st here.
 Leave now to oppose thyself against the king:

Thou seest by nature he is mild and calm;
And, seeing his mind so dotes on Gaveston,
Let him without controlment have his will.
The mightiest kings have had their minions;
Great Alexander lov'd Hephæstion,
The conquering Hercules for Hylas wept,
And for Patroclus stern Achilles droop'd
And not kings only, but the wisest men;
The Roman Tully lov'd Octavius,
Grave Socrates wild Alcibiades.
Then let his grace, whose youth is flexible,
And promiseth as much as we can wish,
Freely enjoy that vain light-headed earl;
For riper years will wean him from such toys.

Y. Mor. Uncle, his wanton humour grieves not me;
But this I scorn, that one so basely-born
Should by his sovereign's favour grow so pert,
And riot it with the treasure of the realm,
While soldiers mutiny for want of pay.
He wears a lord's revenue on his back,
And, Midas-like, he jets it in the court,
With base outlandish cullions at his heels,
Whose proud fantastic liveries make such show
As if that Proteus, god of shapes, appear'd.
I have not seen a dapper Jack so brisk:
He wears a short Italian hooded cloak,
Larded with pearl, and in his Tuscan cap
A jewel of more value than the crown.
While others walk below, the king and he,
From out a window, laugh at such as we,
And flout our train, and jest at our attire.
Uncle, 'tis this that makes me impatient.

E. Mor. But, nephew, now you see the king is chang'd.

Y. Mor. Then so I am, and live to do him service:

But, whiles I have a sword, a hand, a heart,
I will not yield to any such upstart.

You know my mind: come, uncle, let's away.

[_Exeunt._

Enter the younger SPENSER _and_ BALDOCK.

Bald. Spenser,

Seeing that our lord the Earl of Gloucester's dead,
Which of the nobles dost thou mean to serve?

Y. Spen. Not Mortimer, nor any of his side,

Because the king and he are enemies.

Baldock, learn this of me: a factious lord

Shall hardly do himself good, much less us;

But he that hath the favour of a king

May with one word advance us while we live.

The liberal Earl of Cornwall is the man

On whose good fortune Spenser's hope depends.
Bald. What, mean you, then, to be his follower?
Y. Spen. No, his companion; for he loves me well,
And would have once preferr'd me to the king.
Bald. But he is banish'd; there's small hope of him.
Y. Spen. Ay, for a while; but, Baldock, mark the end.
A friend of mine told me in secrecy
That he's repeal'd and sent for back again;
And even now a post came from the court
With letters to our lady from the king;
And, as she read, she smil'd; which makes me think
It is about her lover Gaveston.
Bald. 'Tis like enough; for, since he was exil'd,
She neither walks abroad nor comes in sight.
But I had thought the match had been broke off,
And that his banishment had chang'd her mind.
Y. Spen. Our lady's first love is not wavering;
My life for thine, she will have Gaveston.
Bald. Then hope I by her means to be preferr'd,
Having read unto her since she was a child.
Y. Spen. Then, Baldock, you must cast the scholar off,
And learn to court it like a gentleman.
'Tis not a black coat and a little band,
A velvet-cap'd cloak, fac'd before with serge,
And smelling to a nosegay all the day,
Or holding of a napkin in your hand,
Or saying a long grace at a table's end,
Or making low legs to a nobleman,
Or looking downward, with your eye-lids close,
And saying, "Truly, an't may please your honour,"
Can get you any favour with great men:
You must be proud, bold, pleasant, resolute,
And now and then stab, as occasion serves.
Bald. Spenser, thou know'st I hate such formal toys,
And use them but of mere hypocrisy.
Mine old lord, whiles he liv'd, was so precise,
That he would take exceptions at my buttons,
And, being like pins' heads, blame me for the bigness;
Which made me curate-like in mine attire,
Though inwardly licentious enough,
And apt for any kind of villany.
I am none of these common pedants, I,
That cannot speak without _propterea quod._
Y. Spen. But one of those that saith _quando-quidem_,
And hath a special gift to form a verb.
Bald. Leave off this jesting; here my lady comes.

Enter KING EDWARD'S Niece.

Niece. The grief for his exile was not so much

As is the joy of his returning home.
 This letter came from my sweet Gaveston:
 What need'st thou, love, thus to excuse thyself?
 I know thou couldst not come and visit me. [_Reads._
 I will not long be from thee, though I die;--
 This argues the entire love of my lord;-- [_Reads._
 When I forsake thee, death seize on my heart!--
 But stay thee here where Gaveston shall sleep.
 [_Puts the letter into her bosom._
 Now to the letter of my lord the king:
 He wills me to repair unto the court,
 And meet my Gaveston: why do I stay,
 Seeing that he talks thus of my marriage day?--
 Who's there? Baldock!
 See that my coach be ready; I must hence.
 Bald. It shall be done, madam.
 Niece. And meet me at the park-pale presently [_Exit Baldock._
 Spenser, stay you, and bear me company,
 For I have joyful news to tell thee of;
 My lord of Cornwall is a-coming over,
 And will be at the court as soon as we.
 Y. Spen. I knew the king would have him home again.
 Niece. If all things sort out, as I hope they will,
 Thy service, Spenser, shall be thought upon.
 Y. Spen. I humbly thank your ladyship.
 Niece. Come, lead the way: I long till I am there. [_Exeunt._

 Enter KING EDWARD, QUEEN ISABELLA, KENT, LANCASTER,
 the younger MORTIMER, WARWICK, PEMBROKE, _and_
 Attendants.

 K. Edw. The wind is good; I wonder why he stays:
 I fear me he is wreck'd upon the sea.
 Q. Isab. Look, Lancaster, how passionate he is,
 And still his mind runs on his minion!
 Lan. My lord,--
 K. Edw. How now! what news? is Gaveston arriv'd?
 Y. Mor. Nothing but Gaveston! what means your grace?
 You have matters of more weight to think upon:
 The King of France sets foot in Normandy.
 K. Edw. A trifle! we'll expel him when we please.
 But tell me, Mortimer, what's thy device
 Against the stately triumph we decreed?
 Y. Mor. A homely one, my lord, not worth the telling.
 K. Edw. Pray thee, let me know it.
 Y. Mor. But, seeing you are so desirous, thus it is;
 A lofty cedar tree, fair flourishing,
 On whose top branches kingly eagles perch,
 And by the bark a canker creeps me up,
 And gets unto the highest bough of all;

The motto, *Æque tandem*.
K. Edw. And what is yours, my Lord of Lancaster?
Lan. My lord, mine's more obscure than Mortimer's.
Pliny reports, there is a flying-fish
Which all the other fishes deadly hate,
And therefore, being pursu'd, it takes the air:
No sooner is it up, but there's a fowl
That seizeth it: this fish, my lord, I bear;
The motto this, *Undique mors est*.
Kent. Proud Mortimer! ungentle Lancaster!
Is this the love you bear your sovereign?
Is this the fruit your reconciliation bears?
Can you in words make show of amity,
And in your shields display your rancorous minds?
What call you this but private libelling
Against the Earl of Cornwall and my brother?
Q. Isab. Sweet husband, be content; they all love you.
K. Edw. They love me not that hate my Gaveston.
I am that cedar; shake me not too much;
And you the eagles; soar ye ne'er so high,
I have the jesses that will pull you down;
And *Æque tandem* shall that canker cry
Unto the proudest peer of Britainy.
Thou that compar'st him to a flying-fish,
And threaten'st death whether he rise or fall,
'Tis not the hugest monster of the sea,
Nor foulest harpy, that shall swallow him.
Y. Mor. If in his absence thus he favours him,
What will he do whenas he shall be present?
Lan. That shall we see: look, where his lordship come!

Enter GAVESTON.

K. Edw. My Gaveston!
Welcome to Tynmouth! welcome to thy friend!
Thy absence made me droop and pine away;
For, as the lovers of fair Danaë,
When she was lock'd up in a brazen tower,
Desir'd her more, and wax'd outrageous,
So did it fare with me: and now thy sight
Is sweeter far than was thy parting hence
Bitter and irksome to my sobbing heart.
Gav. Sweet lord and king, your speech preventeth mine;
Yet have I words left to express my joy:
The shepherd, nipt with biting winter's rage,
Frolics not more to see the painted spring
Than I do to behold your majesty.
K. Edw. Will none of you salute my Gaveston?
Lan. Salute him! yes.--Welcome, Lord Chamberlain!
Y. Mor. Welcome is the good Earl of Cornwall!

War. Welcome, Lord Governor of the Isle of Man!
 Pem. Welcome, Master Secretary!
 Kent. Brother, do you hear them?
 K. Edw. Still will these earls and barons use me thus?
 Gav. My lord, I cannot brook these injuries.
 Q. Isab. Ay me, poor soul, when these begin to jar! [_Aside._
 K. Edw. Return it to their throats; I'll be thy warrant.
 Gav. Base, leaden earls, that glory in your birth,
 Go sit at home, and eat your tenants' beef;
 And come not here to scoff at Gaveston,
 Whose mounting thoughts did never creep so low
 As to bestow a look on such as you.
 Lan. Yet I disdain not to do this for you.
 [_Draws his sword, and offers to stab Gaveston._
 K. Edw. Treason! treason! where's the traitor?
 Pem. Here, here!
 K. Edw. Convey hence Gaveston; they'll murder him.
 Gav. The life of thee shall salve this foul disgrace.
 Y. Mor. Villain, thy life! unless I miss mine aim. [_Wounds Gaveston._
 Q. Isab. Ah, furious Mortimer, what hast thou done.
 Y. Mor. No more than I would answer, were he slain.
 [_Exit Gaveston with Attendants._
 K. Edw. Yes, more than thou canst answer, though he live:
 Dear shall you both abide this riotous deed:
 Out of my presence! come not near the court.
 Y. Mor. I'll not be barr'd the court for Gaveston.
 Lan. We'll hale him by the ears unto the block.
 K. Edw. Look to your own heads; his is sure enough.
 War. Look to your own crown, if you back him thus.
 Kent. Warwick, these words do ill beseem thy years.
 K. Edw. Nay, all of them conspire to cross me thus:
 But, if I live, I'll tread upon their heads
 That think with high looks thus to tread me down.
 Come, Edmund, let's away, and levy men:
 'Tis war that must abate these barons' pride.
 [_Exeunt King Edward, Queen Isabella, and Kent._
 War. Let's to our castles, for the king is mov'd.
 Y. Mor. Mov'd may he be, and perish in his wrath!
 Lan. Cousin, it is no dealing with him now;
 He means to make us stoop by force of arms:
 And therefore let us jointly here protest
 To prosecute that Gaveston to the death.
 Y. Mor. By heaven, the abject villain shall not live!
 War. I'll have his blood, or die in seeking it.
 Pem. The like oath Pembroke takes.
 Lan. And so doth Lancaster.
 Now send our heralds to defy the king;
 And make the people swear to put him down.

_Enter a Messenger.

Y. Mor. Letters! from whence?
Mes. From Scotland, my lord. [_Giving letters to Mortimer._
Lan. Why, how now, cousin! how fare all our friends?
Y. Mor. My uncle's taken prisoner by the Scots.
Lan. We'll have him ransom'd, man: be of good cheer.
Y. Mor. They rate his ransom at five thousand pound.
Who should defray the money but the king,
Seeing he is taken prisoner in his wars?
I'll to the king.
Lan. Do, cousin, and I'll bear thee company.
War. Meantime my Lord of Pembroke and myself
Will to Newcastle here, and gather head.
Y. Mor. About it, then, and we will follow you.
Lan. Be resolute and full of secrecy.
War. I warrant you. [_Exit with Pembroke._
Y. Mor. Cousin, an if he will not ransom him,
I'll thunder such a peal into his ears
As never subject did unto his king.
Lan. Content; I'll bear my part.--Hollo! who's there?

Enter Guard.

Y. Mor. Ay, marry, such a guard as this doth well.
Lan. Lead on the way.
Guard. Whither will your lordships?
Y. Mor. Whither else but to the king?
Guard. His highness is dispos'd to be alone.
Lan. Why, so he may; but we will speak to him.
Guard. You may not in, my lord.
Y. Mor. May we not?

Enter KING EDWARD _and_ KENT.

K. Edw. How now!
What noise is this? who have we here? is't you? [_Going._
Y. Mor. Nay, stay, my lord; I come to bring you news;
Mine uncle's taken prisoner by the Scots.
K. Edw. Then ransom him.
Lan. 'Twas in your wars; you should ransom him.
Y. Mor. And you will ransom him, or else--
Kent. What, Mortimer, you will not threaten him?
K. Edw. Quiet yourself; you shall have the broad seal,
To gather for him th[o]roughout the realm.
Lan. Your minion Gaveston hath taught you this.
Y. Mor. My lord, the family of the Mortimers
Are not so poor, but, would they sell their land,
'Twould levy men enough to anger you.
We never beg, but use such prayers as these.
K. Edw. Shall I still be haunted thus?

Y. Mor. Nay, now you are here alone, I'll speak my mind.

Lan. And so will I; and then, my lord, farewell.

Y. Mor. The idle triumphs, masks, lascivious shows,
And prodigal gifts bestow'd on Gaveston,
Have drawn thy treasury dry, and made thee weak;
The murmuring commons, overstretched, break.

Lan. Look for rebellion, look to be depos'd:
Thy garrisons are beaten out of France,
And, lame and poor, lie groaning at the gates;
The wild Oneil, with swarms of Irish kerns,
Lives uncontroll'd within the English pale;
Unto the walls of York the Scots make road,
And, unresisted, drive away rich spoils.

Y. Mor. The haughty Dane commands the narrow seas,
While in the harbour ride thy ships unrigg'd.

Lan. What foreign prince sends thee ambassadors?

Y. Mor. Who loves thee, but a sort of flatterers?

Lan. Thy gentle queen, sole sister to Valois,
Complains that thou hast left her all forlorn.

Y. Mor. Thy court is naked, being bereft of those
That make a king seem glorious to the world,
I mean the peers, whom thou shouldst dearly love;
Libels are cast against thee in the street;
Ballads and rhymes made of thy overthrow.

Lan. The northern borderers, seeing their houses burnt,
Their wives and children slain, run up and down,
Cursing the name of thee and Gaveston.

Y. Mor. When wert thou in the field with banner spread,
But once? and then thy soldiers march'd like players,
With garish robes, not armour; and thyself,
Bedaub'd with gold, rode laughing at the rest,
Nodding and shaking of thy spangled crest,
Where women's favours hung like labels down.

Lan. And thereof came it that the fleering Scots,
To England's high disgrace, have made this jig;
_Maids of England, sore may you mourn,
For your lemans you have lost at Bannocksbourn,--
With a heave and a ho!
What weeneth the king of England
So soon to have won Scotland!--
With a rombelow!_

Y. Mor. Wigmore shall fly, to set my uncle free.

Lan. And, when 'tis gone, our swords shall purchase more.
If you be mov'd, revenge it as you can:

Look next to see us with our ensigns spread. [_Exit with Y. Mortimer._]

K. Edw. My swelling heart for very anger breaks:
How oft have I been baited by these peers,
And dare not be reveng'd, for their power is great!
Yet, shall the crowning of these cockerels
Affright a lion? Edward, unfold thy paws,

And let their lives'-blood slake thy fury's hunger.
 If I be cruel and grow tyrannous,
 Now let them thank themselves, and rue too late.
 Kent. My lord, I see your love to Gaveston
 Will be the ruin of the realm and you,
 For now the wrathful nobles threaten wars;
 And therefore, brother, banish him for ever.
 K. Edw. Art thou an enemy to my Gaveston?
 Kent. Ay; and it grieves me that I favour'd him.
 K. Edw. Traitor, be gone! whine thou with Mortimer.
 Kent. So will I, rather than with Gaveston.
 K. Edw. Out of my sight, and trouble me no more!
 Kent. No marvel though thou scorn thy noble peers,
 When I thy brother am rejected thus.
 K. Edw. Away! [Exit Kent._
 Poor Gaveston, thou hast no friend but me!
 Do what they can, we'll live in Tynmouth here;
 And, so I walk with him about the walls,
 What care I though the earls begirt us round?
 Here comes she that is cause of all these jars.

 Enter QUEEN ISABELLA, _with_ EDWARD'S NIECE, _two_ Ladies,
 GAVESTON, BALDOCK, _and the younger_ SPENSER.

 Q. Isab. My lord, 'tis thought the earls are up in arms.
 K. Edw. Ay, and 'tis likewise thought you favour 'em.
 Q. Isab. Thus do you still suspect me without cause.
 Niece. Sweet uncle, speak more kindly to the queen.
 Gav. My lord, dissemble with her; speak her fair.
 K. Edw. Pardon me, sweet; I forgot myself.
 Q. Isab. Your pardon is quickly got of Isabel.
 K. Edw. The younger Mortimer is grown so brave,
 That to my face he threatens civil wars.
 Gav. Why do you not commit him to the Tower?
 K. Edw. I dare not, for the people love him well.
 Gav. Why, then, we'll have him privily made away.
 K. Edw. Would Lancaster and he had both carous'd
 A bowl of poison to each other's health!
 But let them go, and tell me what are these.
 Niece. Two of my father's servants whilst he liv'd:
 May't please your grace to entertain them now.
 K. Edw. Tell me, where wast thou born? what is thine arms?
 Bald. My name is Baldock, and my gentry
 I fetch from Oxford, not from heraldry.
 K. Edw. The fitter art thou, Baldock, for my turn.
 Wait on me, and I'll see thou shalt not want.
 Bald. I humbly thank your majesty.
 K. Edw. Knowest thou him, Gaveston.
 Gav. Ay, my lord;
 His name is Spenser; he is well allied:

For my sake let him wait upon your grace;
Scarce shall you find a man of more desert.
K. Edw. Then, Spenser, wait upon me for his sake:
I'll grace thee with a higher style ere long.
Y. Spen. No greater titles happen unto me
Than to be favour'd of your majesty!
K. Edw. Cousin, this day shall be your marriage feast:--
And, Gaveston, think that I love thee well,
To wed thee to our niece, the only heir
Unto the Earl of Gloucester late deceas'd.
Gav. I know, my lord, many will stomach me;
But I respect neither their love nor hate.
K. Edw. The headstrong barons shall not limit me;
He that I list to favour shall be great.
Come, let's away; and, when the marriage ends,
Have at the rebels and their complices! [_Exeunt._]

Enter KENT, LANCASTER, _the younger_ MORTIMER,
WARWICK, PEMBROKE, _and others._

Kent. My lords, of love to this our native land,
I come to join with you, and leave the king;
And in your quarrel, and the realm's behoof,
Will be the first that shall adventure life.
Lan. I fear me, you are sent of policy,
To undermine us with a show of love.
War. He is your brother; therefore have we cause
To cast the worst, and doubt of your revolt.
Kent. Mine honour shall be hostage of my truth:
If that will not suffice, farewell, my lords.
Y. Mor. Stay, Edmund: never was Plantagenet
False of his word; and therefore trust we thee.
Pem. But what's the reason you should leave him now?
Kent. I have inform'd the Earl of Lancaster.
Lan. And it sufficeth. Now, my lords, know this,
That Gaveston is secretly arriv'd,
And here in Tynmouth frolics with the king.
Let us with these our followers scale the walls,
And suddenly surprise them unawares.
Y. Mor. I'll give the onset.
War. And I'll follow thee.
Y. Mor. This tatter'd ensign of my ancestors,
Which swept the desert shore of that Dead Sea
Whereof we got the name of Mortimer,
Will I advance upon this castle [']s walls--
Drums, strike alarum, raise them from their sport,
And ring aloud the knell of Gaveston!
Lan. None be so hardy as to touch the king;
But neither spare you Gaveston nor his friends. [_Exeunt._]

Enter, severally KING EDWARD _and the younger_
SPENSER.

K. Edw. O, tell me, Spenser, where is Gaveston?

Y. Spen. I fear me he is slain, my gracious lord.

K. Edw. No, here he comes; now let them spoil and kill.

Enter QUEEN ISABELLA, KING EDWARD'S Niece,
GAVESTON, _and_ Nobles.

Fly, fly, my lords; the earls have got the hold;

Take shipping, and away to Scarborough:

Spenser and I will post away by land.

Gav. O, stay, my lord! they will not injure you.

K. Edw. I will not trust them. Gaveston, away!

Gav. Farewell, my lord.

K. Edw. Lady, farewell.

Niece. Farewell, sweet uncle, till we meet again.

K. Edw. Farewell, sweet Gaveston; and farewell, niece.

Q. Isab. No farewell to poor Isabel thy queen?

K. Edw. Yes, yes, for Mortimer your lover's sake.

Q. Isab. Heavens can witness, I love none but you.

[_Exeunt all except Queen Isabella._

From my embracements thus he breaks away.

O, that mine arms could close this isle about,

That I might pull him to me where I would!

Or that these tears, that drizzle from mine eyes,

Had power to mollify his stony heart,

That, when I had him, we might never part!

Enter LANCASTER, WARWICK, _the younger_ MORTIMER, _and
others. Alarums within._

Lan. I wonder how he scap'd.

Y. Mor. Who's this? the queen!

Q. Isab. Ay, Mortimer, the miserable queen,
Whose pining heart her inward sighs have blasted,
And body with continual mourning wasted:
These hands are tir'd with haling of my lord
From Gaveston, from wicked Gaveston;
And all in vain; for, when I speak him fair,
He turns away, and smiles upon his minion.

Y. Mor. Cease to lament, and tell us where's the king?

Q. Isab. What would you with the king? is't him you seek?

Lan. No, madam, but that cursed Gaveston:

Far be it from the thought of Lancaster

To offer violence to his sovereign!

We would but rid the realm of Gaveston:

Tell us where he remains, and he shall die.

Q. Isab. He's gone by water unto Scarborough:

Pursue him quickly, and he cannot scape;
The king hath left him, and his train is small.
War. Forslow no time, sweet Lancaster; let's march.
Y. Mor. How comes it that the king and he is parted?
Q. Isab. That thus your army, going several ways,
Might be of lesser force, and with the power
That he intendeth presently to raise,
Be easily suppress'd: therefore be gone.
Y. Mor. Here in the river rides a Flemish hoy:
Let's all aboard, and follow him amain.
Lan. The wind that bears him hence will fill our sails;
Come, come, aboard! 'tis but an hour's sailing.
Y. Mor. Madam, stay you within this castle here.
Q. Isab. No, Mortimer; I'll to my lord the king.
Y. Mor. Nay, rather sail with us to Scarborough.
Q. Isab. You know the king is so suspicious
As, if he hear I have but talk'd with you,
Mine honour will be call'd in question;
And therefore, gentle Mortimer, be gone.
Y. Mor. Madam, I cannot stay to answer you:
But think of Mortimer as he deserves.
[_Exeunt all except Queen Isabella._]
Q. Isab. So well hast thou deserv'd, sweet Mortimer,
As Isabel could live with thee for ever.
In vain I look for love at Edward's hand,
Whose eyes are fix'd on none but Gaveston.
Yet once more I'll importune him with prayer:
If he be strange, and not regard my words,
My son and I will over into France,
And to the king my brother there complain
How Gaveston hath robb'd me of his love:
But yet, I hope, my sorrows will have end,
And Gaveston this blessed day be slain. [_Exit._]

[_Enter_ GAVESTON, _pursued._]

Gav. Yet, lusty lords, I have escap'd your hands,
Your threats, your 'larums, and your hot pursuits;
And, though divorced from King Edward's eyes,
Yet liveth Pierce of Gaveston unsurpris'd,
Breathing in hope (malgrado all your beards,
That muster rebels thus against your king)
To see his royal sovereign once again.

[_Enter_ WARWICK, LANCASTER, PEMBROKE, _the younger_
MORTIMER, Soldiers, JAMES _and other_ Attendants _of_
PENBROKE.

War. Upon him, soldiers! take away his weapons!
Y. Mor. Thou proud disturber of thy country's peace,

Corrupter of thy king, cause of these broils,
Base flatterer, yield! and, were it not for shame,
Shame and dishonour to a soldier's name,
Upon my weapon's point here shouldst thou fall,
And welter in thy gore.

Lan. Monster of men,
That, like the Greekish strumpet, train'd to arms
And bloody wars so many valiant knights,
Look for no other fortune, wretch, than death!
King Edward is not here to buckler thee.

War. Lancaster, why talk'st thou to the slave?--
Go, soldiers, take him hence; for, by my sword,
His head shall off.--Gaveston, short warning
Shall serve thy turn: it is our country's cause
That here severely we will execute
Upon thy person.--Hang him at a bough.

Gav. My lord,--

War. Soldiers, have him away.--
But, for thou wert the favourite of a king,
Thou shalt have so much honour at our hands.

Gav. I thank you all, my lords: then I perceive
That heading is one, and hanging is the other,
And death is all.

Enter ARUNDEL.

Lan. How now, my Lord of Arundel!

Arun. My lords, King Edward greets you all by me.

War. Arundel, say your message.

Arun. His majesty, hearing that you had taken Gaveston,
Entreateth you by me, yet but he may
See him before he dies; for why, he says,
And sends you word, he knows that die he shall;
And, if you gratify his grace so far,
He will be mindful of the courtesy.

War. How now!

Gav. Renowned Edward, how thy name
Revives poor Gaveston!

War. No, it needeth not:
Arundel, we will gratify the king
In other matters; he must pardon us in this.--
Soldiers, away with him!

Gav. Why, my Lord of Warwick,
Will now these short delays beget my hopes?
I know it, lords, it is life you aim at,
Yet grant King Edward this.

Y. Mor. Shalt thou appoint
What we shall grant?--Soldiers, away with him!--
Thus we'll gratify the king;
We'll send his head by thee; let him bestow

His tears on that, for that is all he gets
 Of Gaveston, or else his senseless trunk.
 Lan. Not so, my lord, lest he bestow more cost
 In burying him than he hath ever earn'd.
 Arun. My lords, it is his majesty's request,
 And in the honour of a king he swears,
 He will but talk with him, and send him back.
 War. When, can you tell? Arundel, no; we wot
 He that the care of his realm remits,
 And drives his nobles to these exigents
 For Gaveston, will, if he seize him once,
 Violate any promise to possess him.
 Arun. Then, if you will not trust his grace in keep,
 My lords, I will be pledge for his return.
 Y. Mor. 'Tis honourable in thee to offer this;
 But, for we know thou art a noble gentleman,
 We will not wrong thee so,
 To make away a true man for a thief.
 Gav. How mean'st thou, Mortimer? that is over-base.
 Y. Mor. Away, base groom, robber of king's renown!
 Question with thy companions and mates.
 Pem. My Lord Mortimer, and you, my lords, each one,
 To gratify the king's request therein,
 Touching the sending of this Gaveston,
 Because his majesty so earnestly
 Desires to see the man before his death,
 I will upon mine honour undertake
 To carry him, and bring him back again;
 Provided this, that you, my Lord of Arundel,
 Will join with me.
 War. Pembroke, what wilt thou do?
 Cause yet more bloodshed? is it not enough
 That we have taken him, but must we now
 Leave him on "Had I wist," and let him go?
 Pem. My lords, I will not over-woo your honours:
 But, if you dare trust Pembroke with the prisoner,
 Upon mine oath, I will return him back.
 Arun. My Lord of Lancaster, what say you in this?
 Lan. Why, I say, let him go on Pembroke's word.
 Pem. And you, Lord Mortimer?
 Y. Mor. How say you, my Lord of Warwick?
 War. Nay, do your pleasures: I know how 'twill prove.
 Pem. Then give him me.
 Gav. Sweet sovereign, yet I come
 To see thee ere I die!
 War. Yet not perhaps,
 If Warwick's wit and policy prevail. [_Aside._
 Y. Mor. My Lord of Pembroke, we deliver him you:
 Return him on your honour.--Sound, away!
 [_Exeunt all except Pembroke, Arundel, Gaveston, James

and other attendants of Pembroke._

Pem. My lord, you shall go with me:

My house is not far hence; out of the way

A little; but our men shall go along.

We that have pretty wenches to our wives,

Sir, must not come so near to balk their lips.

Arun. 'Tis very kindly spoke, my Lord of Pembroke:

Your honour hath an adamant of power

To draw a prince.

Pem. So, my lord.--Come hither, James:

I do commit this Gaveston to thee;

Be thou this night his keeper; in the morning

We will discharge thee of thy charge: be gone.

Gav. Unhappy Gaveston, whither go'st thou now?

[_Exit with James and other Attendants of Pembroke._

Horse-boy. My lord, we'll quickly be at Cobham. [_Exeunt._

Enter GAVESTON _mourning, JAMES _and other_ Attendants
of PEMBROKE.

Gav. O treacherous Warwick, thus to wrong thy friend!

James. I see it is your life these arms pursue.

Gav. Weaponless must I fall, and die in bands?

O, must this day be period of my life,

Centre of all my bliss? And ye be men,

Speed to the king.

Enter WARWICK _and_ Soldiers.

War. My Lord of Pembroke's men,

Strive you no longer: I will have that Gaveston.

James. Your lordship doth dishonour to yourself,

And wrong our lord, your honourable friend.

War. No, James, it is my country's cause I follow.--

Go, take the villain: soldiers, come away;

We'll make quick work.--Commend me to your master,

My friend, and tell him that I watch'd it well.--

Come, let thy shadow parley with King Edward.

Gav. Treacherous earl, shall I not see the king?

War. The king of heaven perhaps, no other king.--

Away!

[_Exeunt Warwick and Soldiers with Gaveston._

James. Come, fellows: it booteth not for us to strive:

We will in haste go certify our lord.

[_Exeunt._

Enter KING EDWARD, _the younger_ SPENSER, BALDOCK, Noblemen
of the king's side, and Soldiers _with drums and fifes._

K. Edw. I long to hear an answer from the barons

Touching my friend, my dearest Gaveston.

Ah, Spenser, not the riches of my realm

Can ransom him! ah, he is mark'd to die!
I know the malice of the younger Mortimer;
Warwick I know is rough, and Lancaster
Inexorable; and I shall never see
My lovely Pierce of Gaveston again:
The barons overbear with me their pride.

Y. Spen. Were I King Edward, England's sovereign,
Son to the lovely Eleanor of Spain,
Great Edward Longshanks' issue, would I bear
These braves, this rage, and suffer uncontroll'd
These barons thus to beard me in my land,
In mine own realm? My lord, pardon my speech:
Did you retain your father's magnanimity,
Did you regard the honour of your name,
You would not suffer thus your majesty
Be counterbuff'd of your nobility.
Strike off their heads, and let them preach on poles:
No doubt, such lessons they will teach the rest,
As by their preachments they will profit much,
And learn obedience to their lawful king.

K. Edw. Yes, gentle Spenser, we have been too mild,
Too kind to them; but now have drawn our sword,
And, if they send me not my Gaveston,
We'll steel it on their crest[s], and poll their tops.

Bald. This haught resolve becomes your majesty,
Not to be tied to their affection,
As though your highness were a school-boy still,
And must be aw'd and govern'd like a child.

Enter the elder SPENSER _with his truncheon, and_
Soldiers.

E. Spen. Long live my sovereign, the noble Edward,
In peace triumphant, fortunate in wars!

K. Edw. Welcome, old man: com'st thou in Edward's aid?
Then tell thy prince of whence and what thou art.

E. Spen. Low, with a band of bow-men and of pikes,
Brown bills and targeteers, four hundred strong,
Sworn to defend King Edward's royal right,
I come in person to your majesty,
Spenser, the father of Hugh Spenser there,
Bound to your highness everlastingly
For favour done, in him, unto us all.

K. Edw. Thy father, Spenser?

Y. Spen. True, an it like your grace,
That pours, in lieu of all your goodness shown,
His life, my lord, before your princely feet.

K. Edw. Welcome ten thousand times, old man, again!
Spenser, this love, this kindness to thy king,
Argues thy noble mind and disposition.

Spenser, I here create thee Earl of Wiltshire,
And daily will enrich thee with our favour,
That, as the sunshine, shall reflect o'er thee.
Beside, the more to manifest our love,
Because we hear Lord Bruce doth sell his land,
And that the Mortimers are in hand withal,
Thou shalt have crowns of us t'outbid the barons;
And, Spenser, spare them not, lay it on.--
Soldiers, a largess, and thrice-welcome all!
Y. Spen. My lord, here comes the queen.

Enter QUEEN ISABELLA, PRINCE EDWARD, _and_
LEVUNE.

K. Edw. Madam, what news?
Q. Isab. News of dishonour, lord, and discontent.
Our friend Levune, faithful and full of trust,
Informeth us, by letters and by words,
That Lord Valois our brother, King of France,
Because your highness hath been slack in homage,
Hath seized Normandy into his hands:
These be the letters, this the messenger.
K. Edw. Welcome, Levune.--Tush, Sib, if this be all,
Valois and I will soon be friends again.--
But to my Gaveston: shall I never see,
Never behold thee now!--Madam, in this matter
We will employ you and your little son;
You shall go parley with the King of France.--
Boy, see you bear you bravely to the king,
And do your message with a majesty.
P. Edw. Commit not to my youth things of more weight
Than fits a prince so young as I to bear;
And fear not, lord and father,--heaven's great beams
On Atlas' shoulder shall not lie more safe
Than shall your charge committed to my trust.
Q. Isab. Ah, boy, this towardness makes thy mother fear
Thou art not mark'd to many days on earth!
K. Edw. Madam, we will that you with speed be shipp'd,
And this our son; Levune shall follow you
With all the haste we can despatch him hence.
Choose of our lords to bear you company;
And go in peace; leave us in wars at home.
Q. Isab. Unnatural wars, where subjects brave their king:
God end them once!--My lord, I take my leave,
To make my preparation for France. [_Exit with Prince Edward._

Enter ARUNDEL.

K. Edw. What, Lord Arundel, dost thou come alone?
Arun. Yea, my good lord, for Gaveston is dead.

K. Edw. Ah, traitors, have they put my friend to death?

Tell me, Arundel, died he ere thou cam'st,
Or didst thou see my friend to take his death?

Arun. Neither, my lord; for, as he was surpris'd,
Begirt with weapons and with enemies round,
I did your highness' message to them all,
Demanding him of them, entreating rather,
And said, upon the honour of my name,
That I would undertake to carry him
Unto your highness, and to bring him back.

K. Edw. And, tell me, would the rebels deny me that?

Y. Spen. Proud recreants!

K. Edw. Yea, Spenser, traitors all!

Arun. In found them at the first inexorable;
The Earl of Warwick would not bide the hearing,
Mortimer hardly; Pembroke and Lancaster
Spake least; and when they flatly had denied,
Refusing to receive me pledge for him,
The Earl of Pembroke mildly thus bespake;
"My lord, because our sovereign sends for him,
And promiseth he shall be safe return'd,
I will this undertake, to have him hence,
And see him re-deliver'd to your hands."

K. Edw. Well, and how fortunes [it] that he came not?

Y. Spen. Some treason or some villany was cause.

Arun. The Earl of Warwick seiz'd him on his way;
For, being deliver'd unto Pembroke's men,
Their lord rode home, thinking his prisoner safe;
But, ere he came, Warwick in ambush lay,
And bare him to his death; and in a trench
Strake off his head, and march'd unto the camp.

Y. Spen. A bloody part, flatly 'gainst law of arms!

K. Edw. O, shall I speak, or shall I sigh and die!

Y. Spen. My lord, refer your vengeance to the sword
Upon these barons; hearten up your men;
Let them not unreveng'd murder your friends:
Advance your standard, Edward, in the field,
And march to fire them from their starting-holes.

K. Edw. [_kneeling._] By earth, the common mother of us all,
By heaven, and all the moving orbs thereof,
By this right hand, and by my father's sword,
And all the honours 'longing to my crown,
I will have heads and lives for him as many
As I have manors, castles, towns, and towers!--
Treacherous Warwick! traitorous Mortimer!
If I be England's king, in lakes of gore
Your headless trunks, your bodies will I trail,
That you may drink your fill, and quaff in blood,
And stain my royal standard with the same,
That so my bloody colours may suggest

[_Rises._

Remembrance of revenge immortally
On your accursed traitorous progeny,
You villains that have slain my Gaveston!--
And in this place of honour and of trust,
Spenser, sweet Spenser, I adopt thee here;
And merely of our love we do create thee
Earl of Gloucester and Lord Chamberlain,
Despite of times, despite of enemies.
Y. Spen. My lord, here's a messenger from the barons
Desires access unto your majesty.
K. Edw. Admit him near.

Enter Herald _with his coat of arms._

Her. Long live King Edward, England's lawful lord!
K. Edw. So wish not they, I wis, that sent thee hither:
Thou com'st from Mortimer and his complices:
A ranker rout of rebels never was.
Well, say thy message.
Her. The barons, up in arms, by me salute
Your highness with long life and happiness;
And bid me say, as plainer to your grace,
That if without effusion of blood
You will this grief have ease and remedy,
That from your princely person you remove
This Spenser, as a putrifying branch
That deads the royal vine, whose golden leaves
Empale your princely head, your diadem;
Whose brightness such pernicious upstarts dim,
Say they, and lovingly advise your grace
To cherish virtue and nobility,
And have old servitors in high esteem,
And shake off smooth dissembling flatterers:
This granted, they, their honours, and their lives,
Are to your highness vow'd and consecrate.
Y. Spen. Ah, traitors, will they still display their pride?
K. Edw. Away! tarry no answer, but be gone!--
Rebels, will they appoint their sovereign
His sports, his pleasures, and his company?--
Yet, ere thou go, see how I do divorce [_Embraces young Spenser._
Spenser from thee. Now get thee to thy lords,
And tell them I will come to chastise them
For murdering Gaveston: hie thee, get thee gone!
Edward, with fire and sword, follows at thy heels. [_Exit Herald._
My lord[s], perceive you how these rebels swell?--
Soldiers, good hearts! defend your sovereign's right,
For, now, even now, we march to make them stoop.
Away!

[_Exeunt. Alarums, excursions, a great fight, and a

retreat sounded, within._

Re-enter KING EDWARD, _the elder_ SPENSER, _the younger_ SPENSER, BALDOCK, _and_ Noblemen _of the king's side._

K. Edw. Why do we sound retreat? upon them, lords!
This day I shall your vengeance with my sword
On those proud rebels that are up in arms,
And do confront and countermand their king.

Y. Spen. I doubt it not, my lord; right will prevail.

E. Spen. 'Tis not amiss, my liege, for either part
To breathe a while; our men, with sweat and dust
All chok'd well near, begin to faint for heat;
And this retire refresheth horse and man.

Y. Spen. Here come the rebels.

Enter the younger MORTIMER, LANCASTER, WARWICK,
PEMBROKE, _and others._

Y. Mor. Look, Lancaster, yonder is Edward
Among his flatterers.

Lan. And there let him be,
Till he pay dearly for their company.

War. And shall, or Warwick's sword shall smite in vain.

K. Edw. What, rebels, do you shrink and sound retreat?

Y. Mor. No, Edward, no; thy flatterers faint and fly.

Lan. They'd best betimes forsake thee and their trains,
For they'll betray thee, traitors as they are.

Y. Spen. Traitor on thy face, rebellious Lancaster!

Pem. Away, base upstart! brav'st thou nobles thus?

E. Spen. A noble attempt and honourable deed,
Is it not, trow ye, to assemble aid
And levy arms against your lawful king?

K. Edw. For which, ere long, their heads shall satisfy
T' appease the wrath of their offended king.

Y. Mor. Then, Edward, thou wilt fight it to the last,
And rather bathe thy sword in subjects' blood
Than banish that pernicious company?

K. Edw. Ay, traitors all, rather than thus be brav'd,
Make England's civil towns huge heaps of stones,
And ploughs to go about our palace-gates.

War. A desperate and unnatural resolution!--
Alarum to the fight!

Saint George for England, and the barons' right!

K. Edw. Saint George for England, and King Edward's right!

[_Alarums. Exeunt the two parties severally._

Enter KING EDWARD _and his followers, with the_ Barons
and KENT _captive._

K. Edw. Now, lusty lords, now not by chance of war,
 But justice of the quarrel and the cause,
 Vail'd is your pride: methinks you hang the heads
 But we'll advance them, traitors: now 'tis time
 To be aveng'd on you for all your braves,
 And for the murder of my dearest friend,
 To whom right well you knew our soul was knit,
 Good Pierce of Gaveston, my sweet favourite:
 Ah, rebels, recreants, you made him away!
 Kent. Brother, in regard of thee and of thy land,
 Did they remove that flatterer from thy throne.
 K. Edw. So, sir, you have spoke: away, avoid our presence!
 [_Exit Kent._
 Accursed wretches, was't in regard of us,
 When we had sent our messenger to request
 He might be spar'd to come to speak with us,
 And Pembroke undertook for his return,
 That thou, proud Warwick, watch'd the prisoner,
 Poor Pierce, and headed him 'gainst law of arms?
 For which thy head shall overlook the rest
 As much as thou in rage outwent'st the rest.
 War. Tyrant, I scorn thy threats and menaces;
 It is but temporal that thou canst inflict.
 Lan. The worst is death; and better die to live
 Than live in infamy under such a king.
 K. Edw. Away with them, my lord of Winchester!
 These lusty leaders, Warwick and Lancaster,
 I charge you roundly, off with both their heads!
 Away!
 War. Farewell, vain world!
 Lan. Sweet Mortimer, farewell!
 Y. Mor. England, unkind to thy nobility,
 Groan for this grief! behold how thou art maim'd!
 K. Edw. Go, take that haughty Mortimer to the Tower;
 There see him safe bestow'd; and, for the rest,
 Do speedy execution on them all.
 Be gone!
 Y. Mor. What, Mortimer, can ragged stony walls
 Immure thy virtue that aspires to heaven?
 No, Edward, England's scourge, it may not be;
 Mortimer's hope surmounts his fortune far.
 [_The captive Barons are led off._
 K. Edw. Sound, drums and trumpets! March with me, my friends.
 Edward this day hath crown'd him king anew.
 [_Exeunt all except the younger Spenser,
 Levune and Baldock._
 Y. Spen. Levune, the trust that we repose in thee
 Begets the quiet of King Edward's land:
 Therefore be gone in haste, and with advice
 Bestow that treasure on the lords of France,

That, therewith all enchanted, like the guard
That suffer'd Jove to pass in showers of gold
To Danaë, all aid may be denied
To Isabel the queen, that now in France
Makes friends, to cross the seas with her young son,
And step into his father's regiment.
Levune. That's it these barons and the subtle queen
Long levell'd at.
Bal. Yea, but, Levune, thou seest,
These barons lay their heads on blocks together:
What they intend, the hangman frustrates clean.
Levune. Have you no doubt, my lords, I'll clap so close
Among the lords of France with England's gold,
That Isabel shall make her complaints in vain,
And France shall be obdurate with her tears.
Y. Spen. Then make for France amain; Levune, away!
Proclaim King Edward's wars and victories. [_Exeunt._]

Enter KENT.

Kent. Fair blows the wind for France: blow, gentle gale,
Till Edmund be arriv'd for England's good!
Nature, yield to my country's cause in this!
A brother? no, a butcher of thy friends!
Proud Edward, dost thou banish me thy presence?
But I'll to France, and cheer the wronged queen,
And certify what Edward's looseness is.
Unnatural king, to slaughter nobleman
And cherish flatterers! Mortimer, I stay
Thy sweet escape. Stand gracious, gloomy night,
To his device!

Enter the younger MORTIMER _disguised._

Y. Mor. Holla! who walketh there?
Is't you, my lord?
Kent. Mortimer, 'tis I.
But hath thy portion wrought so happily?
Y. Mor. It hath, my lord: the warders all asleep,
I thank them, gave me leave to pass in peace.
But hath your grace got shipping unto France?
Kent. Fear it not. [_Exeunt._]

Enter QUEEN ISABELLA _and_ PRINCE EDWARD.

Q. Isab. Ah, boy, our friends do fail us all in France!
The lords are cruel, and the king unkind.
What shall we do?
P. Edw. Madam, return to England,
And please my father well; and then a fig

For all my uncle's friendship here in France!
I warrant you, I'll win his highness quickly;
'A loves me better than a thousand Spensers.

Q. Isab. Ah, boy, thou art deceiv'd, at least in this,
To think that we can yet be tun'd together!
No, no, we jar too far.--Unkind Valois!
Unhappy Isabel, when France rejects,
Whither, O, whither dost thou bend thy steps?

Enter SIR JOHN OF HAINAULT.

Sir J. Madam, what cheer?

Q. Isab. Ah, good Sir John of Hainault,
Never so cheerless nor so far distress!

Sir J. I hear, sweet lady, of the king's unkindness:
But droop not, madam; noble minds contemn
Despair. Will your grace with me to Hainault,
And there stay time's advantage with your son?--
How say you, my lord! will you go with your friends,
And shake off all our fortunes equally?

P. Edw. So pleaseth the queen my mother, me it likes:
The king of England, not the court of France,
Shall have me from my gracious mother's side,
Till I be strong enough to break a staff;
And then have at the proudest Spenser's head!

Sir J. Well said, my lord!

Q. Isab. O my sweet heart, how do I moan thy wrongs,
Yet triumph in the hope of thee, my joy!--
Ah, sweet Sir John, even to the utmost verge
Of Europe, on the shore of Tanais,
Will we with thee to Hainault--so we will:
The marquis is a noble gentleman;
His grace, I dare presume, will welcome me.--
But who are these?

Enter KENT _and the younger_ MORTIMER.

Kent. Madam, long may you live,
Much happier than your friends in England do!

Q. Isab. Lord Edmund and Lord Mortimer alive!
Welcome to France! the news was here, my lord,
That you were dead, or very near your death.

Y. Mor. Lady, the last was truest of the twain:
But Mortimer, reserv'd for better hap,
Hath shaken off the thralldom of the Tower,
And lives t' advance your standard, good my lord.

P. Edw. How mean you, and the king my father lives?
No, my Lord Mortimer, not I, I trow.

Q. Isab. Not, son! Why not? I would it were no worse!--
But, gentle lords, friendless we are in France.

Y. Mor. Monsieur Le Grand, a noble friend of yours,
 Told us, at our arrival, all the news,--
 How hard the nobles, how unkind the king
 Hath show'd himself: but, madam, right makes room
 Where weapons want; and, though a many friends
 Are made away, as Warwick, Lancaster,
 And others of our part and faction,
 Yet have we friends, assure your grace, in England,
 Would cast up caps, and clap their hands for joy,
 To see us there, appointed for our foes.
 Kent. Would all were well, and Edward well reclaim'd,
 For England's honour, peace, and quietness!
 Y. Mor. But by the sword, my lord, 't must be deserv'd:
 The king will ne'er forsake his flatterers.
 Sir J. My lords of England, sith th' ungentle king
 Of France refuseth to give aid of arms
 To this distressed queen, his sister, here,
 Go you with her to Hainault: doubt ye not
 We will find comfort, money, men, and friends,
 Ere long to bid the English king a base.--
 How say'st, young prince, what think you of the match?
 P. Edw. I think King Edward will outrun us all.
 Q. Isab. Nay, son, not so; and you must not discourage
 Your friends that are so forward in your aid.
 Kent. Sir John of Hainault, pardon us, I pray:
 These comforts that you give our woful queen
 Bind us in kindness all at your command.
 Q. Isab. Yea, gentle brother:--and the God of heaven
 Prosper your happy motion, good Sir John!
 Y. Mor. This noble gentleman, forward in arms,
 Was born, I see, to be our anchor-hold.--
 Sir John of Hainault, be it thy renown,
 That England's queen and nobles in distress
 Have been by thee restor'd and comforted.
 Sir J. Madam, along; and you, my lord[s], with me,
 That England's peers may Hainault's welcome see. [_Exeunt._]

Enter KING EDWARD, ARUNDEL, _the elder_ SPENSER, _the
 younger_ SPENSER, _and others._

K. Edw. Thus, after many threats of wrathful war,
 Triumpheth England's Edward with his friends,
 And triumph Edward with his friends uncontroll'd!--
 My Lord of Gloucester, do you hear the news?
 Y. Spen. What news, my lord?
 K. Edw. Why, man, they say there is great execution
 Done through the realm.--My Lord of Arundel,
 You have the note, have you not?
 Arun. From the Lieutenant of the Tower, my lord.
 K. Edw. I pray, let us see it. [_Takes the note from Arundel._]

--What have we there?--

Read it, Spenser.

[_ Gives the note to young Spenser, who reads
their names._

Why, so: they bark'd apace a month ago;

Now, on my life, they'll neither bark nor bite.

Now, sirs, the news from France? Gloucester, I trow,

The lords of France love England's gold so well

As Isabella gets no aid from thence.

What now remains? have you proclaim'd, my lord,

Reward for them can bring in Mortimer?

Y. Spen. My lord, we have; and, if he be in England,

'A will be had ere long, I doubt it not.

K. Edw. If, dost thou say? Spenser, as true as death,

He is in England's ground: our port-masters

Are not so careless of their king's command.

Enter a Messenger.

How now! what news with thee? from whence come these?

Mess. Letters, my lord, and tidings forth of France:

To you, my Lord of Gloucester, from Levune.

[_ Gives letters to young Spenser._

K. Edw. Read.

Y. Spen. [reading.] _My duty to your honour promised, etc., I
have, according to instructions in that behalf, dealt with the
King of France and his lords, and effected that the queen, all
discontented and discomfited, is gone: whither, if you ask,
with Sir John of Hainault, brother to the marquis, into
Flanders. With them are gone Lord Edmund and the Lord
Mortimer, having in their company divers of your nation,
and others; and, as constant report goeth, they intend to
give King Edward battle in England, sooner than he can
look for them. This is all the news of import.

Your honour's in all service, Levune._

K. Edw. Ah, villains, hath that Mortimer escap'd?

With him is Edmund gone associate?

And will Sir John of Hainault lead the round?

Welcome, o' God's name, madam, and your son!

England shall welcome you and all your rout.

Gallop apace, bright Phœbus, through the sky;

And, dusky Night, in rusty iron car,

Between you both shorten the time, I pray,

That I may see that most desired day,

When we may meet these traitors in the field!

Ah, nothing grieves me, but my little boy

Is thus misled to countenance their ills!

Come, friends, to Bristow, there to make us strong:

And, winds, as equal be to bring them in,

As you injurious were to bear them forth!

[_Exeunt._

Enter QUEEN ISABELLA, PRINCE EDWARD, KENT, _the
younger_ MORTIMER, _and_ SIR JOHN OF HAINAULT.

Q. Isab. Now, lords, our loving friends and countrymen,
Welcome to England all, with prosperous winds!
Our kindest friends in Belgia have we left,
To cope with friends at home; a heavy case
When force to force is knit, and sword and glaive
In civil broils make kin and countrymen
Slaughter themselves in others, and their sides
With their own weapons gor'd! But what's the help?
Misgovern'd kings are cause of all this wreck;
And, Edward, thou art one among them all,
Whose looseness hath betray'd thy land to spoil,
Who made the channel overflow with blood
Of thine own people: patron shouldst thou be;
But thou--

Y. Mor. Nay, madam, if you be a warrior,
You must not grow so passionate in speeches.--
Lords, sith that we are, by sufferance of heaven,
Arriv'd and armed in this prince's right,
Here for our country's cause swear we to him
All homage, fealty, and forwardness;
And for the open wrongs and injuries
Edward hath done to us, his queen, and land,
We come in arms to wreck it with the sword;
That England's queen in peace may repossess
Her dignities and honours; and withal
We may remove these flatterers from the king
That havock England's wealth and treasury.

Sir J. Sound trumpets, my lord, and forward let us march.
Edward will think we come to flatter him.

Kent. I would he never had been flatter'd more! [_Exeunt._]

Enter KING EDWARD, BALDOCK, _and the younger_ SPENSER.

Y. Spen. Fly, fly, my lord! the queen is overstrong;
Her friends do multiply, and yours do fail.
Shape we our course to Ireland, there to breathe.

K. Edw. What, was I born to fly and run away,
And leave the Mortimers conquerors behind?
Give me my horse, and let's reinforce our troops.
And in this bed of honour die with fame.

Bald. O, no, my lord! this princely resolution
Fits not the time: away! we are pursu'd. [_Exeunt._]

Enter KENT, _with a sword and target._

Kent. This way he fled; but I am come too late.

Edward, alas, my heart relents for thee!
Proud traitor, Mortimer, why dost thou chase
Thy lawful king, thy sovereign, with thy sword?
Vile wretch, and why hast thou, of all unkind,
Borne arms against thy brother and thy king?
Rain showers of vengeance on my cursed head,
Thou God, to whom in justice it belongs
To punish this unnatural revolt!
Edward, this Mortimer aims at thy life:
O, fly him, then! But, Edmund, calm this rage;
Dissemble, or thou diest; for Mortimer
And Isabel do kiss, while they conspire:
And yet she bears a face of love, forsooth:
Fie on that love that hatcheth death and hate!
Edmund, away! Bristow to Longshanks' blood
Is false; be not found single for suspect:
Proud Mortimer pries near into thy walks.

Enter QUEEN ISABELLA, PRINCE EDWARD, _the younger_
MORTIMER, _and_ SIR JOHN JOHN OF HAINAULT.

Q. Isab. Successful battle gives the God of kings
To them that fight in right, and fear in wrath,
Since, then, successfully we have prevail'd,
Thanked be heaven's great architect, and you!
Ere farther we proceed, my noble lords,
We here create our well-beloved son,
Of love and care unto his royal person,
Lord Warden of the realm; and, sith the Fates
Have made his father so infortunate,
Deal you, my lords, in this, my loving lords,
As to your wisdoms fittest seems in all.

Kent. Madam, without offence if I may ask
How will you deal with Edward in his fall?

P. Edw. Tell me, good uncle, what Edward do you mean?

Kent. Nephew, your father; I dare not call him king.

Y. Mor. My Lord of Kent, what needs these questions?

'Tis not in her controlment nor in ours;
But as the realm and parliament shall please,
So shall your brother be disposed of.--
I like not this relenting mood in Edmund:

Madam, 'tis good to look to him betimes. [_Aside to the Queen._]

Q. Isab. My lord, the Mayor of Bristow knows our mind.

Y. Mor. Yea, madam; and they scape not easily
That fled the field.

Q. Isab. Baldock is with the king:
A goodly chancellor, is he not, my lord?

Sir J. So are the Spensers, the father and the son.

Y. Mor. This Edward is the ruin of the realm.

Enter RICE AP HOWEL _with the elder_ SPENSER _prisoner,
and_ Attendants.

Rice. God save Queen Isabel and her princely son!
Madam, the Mayor and citizens of Bristow,
In sign of love and duty to this presence,
Present by me this traitor to the state,
Spenser, the father to that wanton Spenser,
That, like the lawless Catiline of Rome,
Revell'd in England's wealth and treasury.

Isab. We thank you all.

Y. Mor. Your loving care in this
Deserveth princely favours and rewards.
But where's the king and the other Spenser fled?

Rice. Spenser the son, created Earl of Glocester,
Is with that smooth-tongu'd scholar Baldock gone,
And shipp'd but late for Ireland with the king.

Y. Mor. Some whirlwind fetch them back, or sink them all!-- [_Aside._
They shall be started thence, I doubt it not.

P. Edw. Shall I not see the king my father yet?

Kent. Unhappy Edward, chas'd from England's bounds! [_Aside._

Sir J. Madam, what resteth? why stand you in a muse?

Q. Isab. I rue my lord's ill-fortune: but, alas,
Care of my country call'd me to this war!

Y. Mor. Madam, have done with care and sad complaint:
Your king hath wrong'd your country and himself,
And we must seek to right it as we may.--
Meanwhile have hence this rebel to the block.

E. Spen. Rebel is he that fights against the prince:
So fought not they that fought in Edward's right.

Y. Mor. Take him away; he prates.

[_Exeunt Attendants with the elder Spenser._

You, Rice ap Howel,
Shall do good service to her majesty,
Being of countenance in your country here,
To follow these rebellious runagates.--
We in mean while, madam, must take advice.
How Baldock, Spenser, and their complices,
May in their fall be follow'd to their end. [_Exeunt._

Enter the Abbot, Monks, KING EDWARD, _the younger_
SPENSER, _and_ BALDOCK (_the three latter disguised_).

Abbot. Have you no doubt, my lord; have you no fear:
As silent and as careful we will be
To keep your royal person safe with us,
Free from suspect, and fell invasion
Of such as have your majesty in chase,
Yourself, and those your chosen company,
As danger of this stormy time requires.

K. Edw. Father, thy face should harbour no deceit.
 O, hadst thou ever been a king, thy heart,
 Pierc'd deeply with sense of my distress,
 Could not but take compassion of my state!
 Stately and proud in riches and in train,
 Whilom I was, powerful and full of pomp:
 But what is he whom rule and empery
 Have not in life or death made miserable?--
 Come, Spenser,--come, Baldock,--come, sit down by me;
 Make trial now of that philosophy
 That in our famous nurseries of arts
 Thou suck'dst from Plato and from Aristotle.--
 Father, this life contemplative is heaven:
 O, that I might this life in quiet lead!
 But we, alas, are chas'd!--and you, my friends,
 Your lives and my dishonour they pursue.--
 Yet, gentle monks, for treasure, gold, nor fee,
 Do you betray us and our company.
 First Monk. Your grace may sit secure, if none but we
 Do wot of your abode.
 Y. Spen. Not one alive: but shrewdly I suspect
 A gloomy fellow in a mead below;
 'A gave a long look after us, my lord;
 And all the land, I know, is up in arms,
 Arms that pursue our lives with deadly hate.
 Bald. We were embark'd for Ireland; wretched we,
 With awkward winds and with sore tempests driven,
 To fall on shore, and here to pine in fear
 Of Mortimer and his confederates!
 K. Edw. Mortimer! who talks of Mortimer?
 Who wounds me with the name of Mortimer,
 That bloody man?--Good father, on thy lap
 Lay I this head, laden with mickle care.
 O, might I never ope these eyes again,
 Never again lift up this drooping head,
 O, never more lift up this dying heart!
 Y. Spen. Look up, my lord.--Baldock, this drowsiness
 Betides no good; here even we are betray'd.

_Enter, with Welsh hooks, _ RICE AP HOWEL, _a_ Mower,
 and LEICESTER.

Mow. Upon my life, these be the men ye seek.
 Rice. Fellow, enough.--My lord, I pray, be short;
 A fair commission warrants what we do.
 Leices. The queen's commission, urg'd by Mortimer:
 What cannot gallant Mortimer with the queen?--
 Alas, see where he sits, and hopes unseen
 T'escape their hands that seek to reave his life!
 Too true it is, _Quem dies vidit veniens superbum,

Hunc dies vidit fugiens jacentem._
 But, Leicester, leave to grow so passionate.--
 Spenser and Baldock, by no other names,
 I arrest you of high treason here.
 Stand not on titles, but obey th' arrest:
 'Tis in the name of Isabel the queen.--
 My lord, why droop you thus?
 K. Edw. O day, the last of all my bliss on earth!
 Centre of all misfortune! O my stars,
 Why do you lour unkindly on a king?
 Comes Leicester, then, in Isabella's name,
 To take my life, my company from me?
 Here, man, rip up this panting breast of mine,
 And take my heart in rescue of my friends.
 Rice. Away with them!
 Y. Spen. It may become thee yet
 To let us take our farewell of his grace.
 Abbott. My heart with pity earns to see this sight;
 A king to bear these words and proud commands! [_Aside._
 K. Edw. Spenser, ah, sweet Spenser, thus, then, must we part?
 Y. Spen. We must, my lord; so will the angry heavens.
 K. Edw. Nay, so will hell and cruel Mortimer:
 The gentle heavens have not to do in this.
 Bald. My lord, it is in vain to grieve or storm.
 Here humbly of your grace we take our leaves:
 Our lots are cast; I fear me, so is thine.
 K. Edw. In heaven we may, in earth ne'er shall we meet:--
 And, Leicester, say, what shall become of us?
 Leices. Your majesty must go to Killingworth.
 K. Edw. Must! it is somewhat hard when kings must go.
 Leices. Here is a litter ready for your grace,
 That waits your pleasure, and the day grows old.
 Rice. As good be gone, as stay and be benighted.
 K. Edw. A litter hast thou? lay me in a hearse,
 And to the gates of hell convey me hence;
 Let Pluto's bells ring out my fatal knell,
 And hags howl for my death at Charon's shore;
 For friends hath Edward none but these,
 And these must die under a tyrant's sword.
 Rice. My lord, be going: care not for these;
 For we shall see them shorter by the heads.
 K. Edw. Well, that shall be shall be: part we must;
 Sweet Spenser, gentle Baldock, part we must.--
 Hence, feigned weeds! unfeigned are my woes.--
 [_Throwing off his disguise._
 Father, farewell.--Leicester, thou stay'st for me;
 And go I must.--Life, farewell, with my friends!
 [_Exeunt King Edward and Leicester._
 Y. Spen. O, is he gone? is noble Edward gone?
 Parted from hence, never to see us more!

Rend, sphere of heaven! and, fire, forsake thy orb!
Earth, melt to air! gone is my sovereign,
Gone, gone, alas, never to make return!
Bald. Spenser, I see our souls are fleeting hence;
We are depriv'd the sunshine of our life.
Make for a new life, man; throw up thy eyes
And heart and hand to heaven's immortal throne;
Pay nature's debt with cheerful countenance;
Reduce we all our lessons unto this,--
To die, sweet Spenser, therefore live we all;
Spenser, all live to die, and rise to fall.
Rice. Come, come, keep these preachments till you come to
the place appointed. You, and such as you are, have
made wise work in England. Will your lordships away?
Mow. Your lordship I trust will remember me?
Rice. Remember thee, fellow! what else? Follow me to
the town. [_Exeunt._]

Enter KING EDWARD, LEICESTER, _the_ BISHOP OF
WINCHESTER, _and_ TRUSSEL.

Leices. Be patient, good my lord, cease to lament;
Imagine Killingworth Castle were your court,
And that you lay for pleasure here a space,
Not of compulsion or necessity.
K. Edw. Leicester, if gentle words might comfort me,
Thy speeches long ago had eas'd my sorrows,
For kind and loving hast thou always been.
The griefs of private men are soon allay'd;
But not of kings. The forest deer, being struck,
Runs to an herb that closeth up the wounds:
But when the imperial lion's flesh is gor'd,
He rends and tears it with his wrathful paw,
[And], highly scorning that the lowly earth
Should drink his blood, mounts up to the air:
And so it fares with me, whose dauntless mind
Th' ambitious Mortimer would seek to curb,
And that unnatural queen, false Isabel,
That thus hath pent and mew'd me in a prison
For such outrageous passions cloy my soul,
As with the wings of rancour and disdain
Full oft[ten] am I soaring up to heaven,
To plain me to the gods against them both.
But when I call to mind I am a king,
Methinks I should revenge me of my wrongs,
That Mortimer and Isabel have done.
But what are kings, when regiment is gone,
But perfect shadows in a sunshine day?
My nobles rule; I bear the name of king,
I wear the crown; but am controll'd by them,

By Mortimer, and my unconstant queen,
Who spots my nuptial bed with infamy;
Whilst I am lodg'd within this cave of care,
Where sorrow at my elbow still attends,
To company my heart with sad laments,
That bleeds within me for this strange exchange.
But tell me, must I now resign my crown,
To make usurping Mortimer a king?

Bish. of Win. Your grace mistakes; it is for England's good,
And princely Edward's right, we crave the crown.

K. Edw. No, 'tis for Mortimer, not Edward's head
For he's a lamb, encompassed by wolves,
Which in a moment will abridge his life.
But, if proud Mortimer do wear this crown,
Heavens turn it to a blaze of quenchless fire!
Or, like the snaky wreath of Tisiphon,
Engirt the temples of his hateful head!
So shall not England's vine be perished,
But Edward's name survive, though Edward dies.

Leices. My lord, why waste you thus the time away?
They stay your answer: will you yield your crown?

K. Edw. Ah, Leicester, weigh how hardly I can brook
To lose my crown and kingdom without cause;
To give ambitious Mortimer my right,
That, like a mountain, overwhelms my bliss;
In which extreme my mind here murder'd is!
But that the heavens appoint I must obey.--
Here, take my crown; the life of Edward too: [_Taking off the crown._
Two kings in England cannot reign at once.
But stay a while: let me be king till night,
That I may gaze upon this glittering crown;
So shall my eyes receive their last content,
My head, the latest honour due to it,
And jointly both yield up their wished right.
Continue ever, thou celestial sun;
Let never silent night possess this clime;
Stand still, you watches of the element;
All times and seasons, rest you at a stay,
That Edward may be still fair England's king!
But day's bright beams doth vanish fast away,
And needs I must resign my wished crown.
Inhuman creatures, nurs'd with tiger's milk,
Why gape you for your sovereign's overthrow?
My diadem, I mean, and guiltless life.
See, monsters, see! I'll wear my crown again.

[_Putting on the crown._

What, fear you not the fury of your king?--
But, hapless Edward, thou art fondly led;
They pass not for thy frowns as late they did,
But seek to make a new-elected king;

Which fills my mind with strange despairing thoughts,
Which thoughts are martyred with endless torments;
And in this torment comfort find I none,
But that I feel the crown upon my head;
And therefore let me wear it yet a while.

Trus. My, lord, the parliament must have present news;
And therefore say, will you resign or no?

[_The king rageth._]

K. Edw. I'll not resign, but, whilst I live, [be king].
Traitors, be gone, and join you with Mortimer.
Elect, conspire, install, do what you will:
Their blood and yours shall seal these treacheries.

Bish. of Win. This answer we'll return; and so, farewell.

[_Going with Trussel._]

Leices. Call them again, my lord, and speak them fair;
For, if they go, the prince shall lose his right.

K. Edw. Call thou them back; I have no power to speak.

Leices. My lord, the king is willing to resign.

Bish. of Win. If he be not, let him choose.

K. Edw. O, would I might! but heavens and earth conspire
To make me miserable. Here, receive my crown.
Receive it? no, these innocent hands of mine
Shall not be guilty of so foul a crime;
He of you all that most desires my blood,
And will be call'd the murderer of a king,
Take it. What, are you mov'd? pity you me?
Then send for unrelenting Mortimer,
And Isabel, whose eyes being turn'd to steel
Will sooner sparkle fire than shed a tear.
Yet stay; for, rather than I'll look on them,
Here, here! [_Gives the crown._]--Now, sweet God of heaven,
Make me despise this transitory pomp,
And sit for aye enthronised in heaven!
Come, death, and with thy fingers close my eyes,
Or, if I live, let me forget myself!

Bish. of Win. My lord,--

K. Edw. Call me not lord; away, out of my sight!
Ah, pardon me! grief makes me lunatic.
Let not that Mortimer protect my son;
More safety there is in a tiger's jaws
Than his embracements. Bear this to the queen,
Wet with my tears, and dried again with sighs:

[_Gives a handkerchief._]

If with the sight thereof she be not mov'd,
Return it back, and dip it in my blood.
Commend me to my son, and bid him rule
Better than I: yet how have I transgress'd,
Unless it be with too much clemency?

Trus. And thus, most humbly do we take our leave.

K. Edw. Farewell.

[_Exeunt the Bishop of Winchester and Trussel with the crown._]

I know the next news that they bring
Will be my death; and welcome shall it be:
To wretched men death is felicity.
Leices. Another post! what news brings he?

Enter BERKELEY, _who gives a paper to_ LEICESTER.

K. Edw. Such news as I expect.--Come, Berkeley, come,
And tell thy message to my naked breast.

Berk. My lord, think not a thought so villanous
Can harbour in a man of noble birth.
To do your highness service and devoir,
And save you from your foes, Berkeley would die.

Leices. My lord, the council of the queen command
That I resign my charge.

K. Edw. And who must keep me now? Must you, my lord?

Berk. Ay, my most gracious lord; so 'tis decreed.

K. Edw. [_Taking the paper._] By Mortimer, whose name is written here!
Well may I rent his name that rends my heart. [_Tears it._]

This poor revenge hath something eas'd my mind:
So may his limbs be torn as is this paper!

Hear me, immortal Jove, and grant it too!

Berk. Your grace must hence with me to Berkeley straight.

K. Edw. Whither you will: all places are alike,
And every earth is fit for burial.

Leices. Favour him, my lord, as much as lieth in you.

Berk. Even so betide my soul as I use him!

K. Edw. Mine enemy hath pitied my estate,
And that's the cause that I am now remov'd.

Berk. And thinks your grace that Berkeley will be cruel?

K. Edw. I know not; but of this am I assur'd,
That death ends all, and I can die but once.--
Leicester, farewell.

Leices. Not yet, my lord; I'll bear you on your way. [_Exeunt._]

Enter QUEEN ISABELLA _and the younger_ MORTIMER.

Y. Mor. Fair Isabel, now have we our desire;
The proud corrupters of the light-brain'd king
Have done their homage to the lofty gallows,
And he himself lies in captivity.
Be rul'd by me, and we will rule the realm:
In any case take heed of childish fear,
For now we hold an old wolf by the ears,
That, if he slip, will seize upon us both,
And gripe the sorer, being grip'd himself.
Think therefore, madam, that imports us much
To erect your son with all the speed we may,

And that I be protector over him:
For our behoof, 'twill bear the greater sway
Whenas a king's name shall be under-writ.

Q. Isab. Sweet Mortimer, the life of Isabel,
Be thou persuaded that I love thee well;
And therefore, so the prince my son be safe,
Whom I esteem as dear as these mine eyes,
Conclude against his father what thou wilt,
And I myself will willingly subscribe.

Y. Mor. First would I hear news he were depos'd,
And then let me alone to handle him.

Enter Messenger.

Letters! from whence?

Mess. From Killingworth, my lord?

Q. Isab. How fares my lord the king?

Mess. In health, madam, but full of pensiveness.

Q. Isab. Alas, poor soul, would I could ease his grief!

Enter the BISHOP OF WINCHESTER _with the crown._

Thanks, gentle Winchester.--

Sirrah, be gone. [_Exit Messenger._

Bish. of Win. The king hath willingly resign'd his crown.

Q. Isab. O, happy news! send for the prince my son.

Bish. of Win. Further, or this letter was seal'd, Lord Berkeley came,
So that he now is gone from Killingworth;
And we have heard that Edmund laid a plot
To set his brother free; nor more but so.
The Lord of Berkeley is so pitiful
As Leicester that had charge of him before.

Q. Isab. Then let some other be his guardian.

Y. Mor. Let me alone; here is the privy-seal,--

[_Exit the Bish. of Win._

Who's there? Call hither, Gurney and Matrevis.--

[_To Attendants within._

To dash the heavy-headed Edmund's drift,
Berkeley shall be discharg'd, the king remov'd,
And none but we shall know where he lieth.

Q. Isab. But, Mortimer, as long as he survives,
What safety rests for us or for my son?

Y. Mor. Speak, shall he presently be despatch'd and die?

Q. Isab. I would he were, so 'twere not by my means!

Enter MATREVIS _and_ GURNEY.

Y. Mor. Enough.--Matrevis, write a letter presently
Unto the Lord of Berkeley from ourself,
That he resign the king to thee and Gurney;

And, when 'tis done, we will subscribe our name.
 Mat. It shall be done, my lord. [_Writes._
 Y. Mor. Gurney,--
 Gur. My lord?
 Y. Mor. As thou intend'st to rise by Mortimer,
 Who now makes Fortune's wheel turn as he please,
 Seek all the means thou canst to make him droop,
 And neither give him kind word nor good look.
 Gur. I warrant you, my lord.
 Y. Mor. And this above the rest: because we hear
 That Edmund casts to work his liberty,
 Remove him still from place to place by night,
 Till at the last he come to Killingworth,
 And then from thence to Berkeley back again;
 And by the way, to make him fret the more,
 Speak curstly to him; and in any case
 Let no man comfort him, if he chance to weep,
 But amplify his grief with bitter words.
 Mat. Fear not, my lord; we'll do as you command.
 Y. Mor. So, now away! post thitherwards amain.
 Q. Isab. Whither goes this letter? to my lord the king?
 Commend me humbly to his majesty,
 And tell him that I labour all in vain
 To ease his grief and work his liberty;
 And bear him this as witness of my love. [_Gives ring._
 Mat. I will, madam. [_Exit with Gurney._
 Y. Mor. Finely dissembled! do so still, sweet queen.
 Here comes the young prince with the Earl of Kent.
 Q. Isab. Something he whispers in his childish ears.
 Y. Mor. If he have such access unto the prince,
 Our plots and stratagems will soon be dash'd.
 Q. Isab. Use Edmund friendly, as if all were well.

Enter PRINCE EDWARD, _and_ KENT _talking with him._
 Y. Mor. How fares my honourable Lord of Kent?
 Kent. In health, sweet Mortimer.--How fares your grace?
 Q. Isab. Well, if my lord your brother were enlarg'd.
 Kent. I hear of late he hath depos'd himself.
 Q. Isab. The more my grief.
 Y. Mor. And mine.
 Kent. Ah, they do dissemble! [_Aside._
 Q. Isab. Sweet son, come hither; I must talk with thee.
 Y. Mor. You, being his uncle and the next of blood,
 Do look to be protector o'er the prince.
 Kent. Not I, my lord: who should protect the son,
 But she that gave him life? I mean the queen.
 P. Edw. Mother, persuade me not to wear the crown:
 Let him be king; I am too young to reign.
 Q. Isab. But be content, seeing 'tis his highness' pleasure.

P. Edw. Let me but see him first, and then I will.
 Kent. Ay, do, sweet nephew.
 Q. Isab. Brother, you know it is impossible.
 P. Edw. Why, is he dead?
 Q. Isab. No, God forbid!
 Kent. I would those words proceeded from your heart!
 Y. Mor. Inconstant Edmund, dost thou favour him,
 That wast a cause of his imprisonment?
 Kent. The more cause now have I to make amends.
 Y. Mor. [_aside to_ Q. ISAB.]
 I tell thee, 'tis not meet that one so false
 Should come about the person of a prince.--
 My lord, he hath betray'd the king his brother,
 And therefore trust him not.
 P. Edw. But he repents, and sorrows for it now.
 Q. Isab. Come, son, and go with this gentle lord and me.
 P. Edw. With you I will, but not with Mortimer.
 Y. Mor. Why, youngling, 'sdain'st thou so of Mortimer?
 Then I will carry thee by force away.
 P. Edw. Help, uncle Kent! Mortimer will wrong me.
 Q. Isab. Brother Edmund, strive not; we are his friends;
 Isabel is nearer than the Earl of Kent.
 Kent. Sister, Edward is my charge; redeem him.
 Q. Isab. Edward is my son, and I will keep him.
 Kent. Mortimer shall know that he hath wronged me.
 Hence will I haste to Killingworth Castle,
 And rescue aged Edward from his foes,
 To be reveng'd on Mortimer and thee. [_Aside._
 [_Exeunt, on the one side, Queen Isabella, Prince Edward
 and the younger Mortimer; on other other, Kent._

Enter MATREVIS, GURNEY, _and_ Soldiers, _with_
 KING EDWARD.

Mat. My lord, be not pensive; we are your friends:
 Men are ordain'd to live in misery;
 Therefore, come; dalliance dangereth our lives.
 K. Edw. Friends, whither must unhappy Edward go?
 Will hateful Mortimer appoint no rest?
 Must I be vexed like the nightly bird,
 Whose sight is loathsome to all winged fowls?
 When will the fury of his mind assuage?
 When will his heart be satisfied with blood?
 If mine will serve, unbowel straight this breast,
 And give my heart to Isabel and him:
 It is the chiefest mark they level at.
 Gur. Not so, my liege: the queen hath given this charge,
 To keep your grace in safety:
 Your passions make your dolours to increase.
 K. Edw. This usage makes my misery increase.

But can my air of life continue long,
When all my senses are annoy'd with stench?
Within a dungeon England's king is kept,
Where I am starv'd for want of sustenance;
My daily diet is heart-breaking sobs,
That almost rent the closet of my heart:
Thus lives old Edward not reliev'd by any,
And so must die, though pitied by many.
O, water, gentle friends, to cool my thirst,
And clear my body from foul excrements!
Mat. Here's channel-water, as our charge is given:
Sit down, for we'll be barbers to your grace.
K. Edw. Traitors, away! what, will you murder me,
Of choke your sovereign with puddle-water?
Gur. No, but wash your face, and shave away your beard,
Lest you be known, and so be rescued.
Mat. Why strive you thus? your labour is in vain.
K. Edw. The wren may strive against the lion's strength,
But all in vain: so vainly do I strive
To seek for mercy at a tyrant's hand.
[_They wash him with puddle-water, and shave his beard
away._
Immortal powers, that know the painful cares
That wait upon my poor distressed soul,
O, level all your looks upon these daring men
That wrong their liege and sovereign, England's king!
O Gaveston, it is for thee that I am wrong'd!
For me both thou and both the Spencers died;
And for your sakes a thousand wrongs I'll take.
The Spencers' ghosts, wherever they remain,
Wish well to mine; then, tush, for them I'll die.
Mat. 'Twixt theirs and yours shall be no enmity.
Come, come, away! Now put the torches out:
We'll enter in by darkness to Killingworth.
Gur. How now! who comes there?

Enter KENT.

Mat. Guard the king sure: it is the Earl of Kent.
K. Edw. O gentle brother, help to rescue me!
Mat. Keep them asunder; thrust in the king.
Kent. Soldiers, let me but talk to him one word.
Gur. Lay hands upon the earl for his assault.
Kent. Lay down your weapons, traitors! yield the king!
Mat. Edmund, yield thou thyself, or thou shalt die.
Kent. Base villains, wherefore do you gripe me thus?
Gur. Bind him, and so convey him to the court.
Kent. Where is the court but here? here is the king
And I will visit him: why stay you me?
Mat. The court is where Lord Mortimer remains:

Thither shall your honour go; and so, farewell.

[_Exeunt Matrevis and Gurney with King Edward._]

Kent. O, miserable is that common-weal,

Where lords keep courts, and kings are lock'd in prison!

First Sold. Wherefore stay we? on, sirs, to the court!

Kent. Ay, lead me whither you will, even to my death,

Seeing that my brother cannot be releas'd.

[_Exeunt._]

[_Enter the younger_ MORTIMER.]

Y. Mor. The king must die, or Mortimer goes down;

The commons now begin to pity him:

Yet he that is the cause of Edward's death,

Is sure to pay for it when his son's of age;

And therefore will I do it cunningly.

This letter, written by a friend of ours,

Contains his death, yet bids then save his life;

[_Reads._]

_Edwardum occidere nolite timere, bonum est,

Fear not to kill the king, 'tis good he die:—

But read it thus, and that's another sense;

_Edwardum occidere nolite, timere bonum est,

Kill not the king, 'tis good to fear the worst.—

Unpointed as it is, thus shall it go.

That, being dead, if it chance to be found,

Matrevis and the rest may bear the blame,

And we be quit that caus'd it to be done.

Within this room is lock'd the messenger

That shall convey it, and perform the rest;

And, by a secret token that he bears,

Shall he be murder'd when the deed is done.--

Lightborn, come forth!

[_Enter_ LIGHTBORN.]

Art thou so resolute as thou wast?

Light. What else, my lord? and far more resolute.

Y. Mor. And hast thou cast how to accomplish it?

Light. Ay, ay; and none shall know which way he died.

Y. Mor. But at his looks, Lightborn, thou wilt relent.

Light. Relent! ha, ha! I use much to relent.

Y. Mor. Well, do it bravely, and be secret.

Light. You shall not need to give instructions;

'Tis not the first time I have kill'd a man:

I learn'd in Naples how to poison flowers;

To strangle with a lawn thrust down the throat;

To pierce the wind pipe with a needle's point;

Or, whilst one is asleep, to take a quill,

And blow a little powder in his ears;

Or open his mouth, and pour quick-silver down.

But yet I have a braver way than these.
Y. Mor. What's that?
Light. Nay, you shall pardon me; none shall know my tricks.
Y. Mor. I care not how it is, so it be not spied.
Deliver this to Gurney and Matrevis: [_Gives letter._
At every ten-mile end thou hast a horse:
Take this [_Gives money_]: away, and never see me more!
Light. No?
Y. Mor. No; unless thou bring me news of Edward's death.
Light. That will I quickly do. Farewell, my lord. [_Exit._
Y. Mor. The prince I rule, the queen do I command,
And with a lowly congé to the ground
The proudest lords salute me as I pass;
I seal, I cancel, I do what I will.
Fear'd am I more than lov'd;--let me be fear'd,
And, when I frown, make all the court look pale.
I view the prince with Aristarchus' eyes,
Whose looks were as a breeching to a boy.
They thrust upon me the protectorship,
And sue to me for that that I desire;
While at the council-table, grave enough,
And not unlike a bashful puritan,
First I complain of imbecility,
Saying it is _onus quam gravissimum;_
Till, being interrupted by my friends,
Suscepi that _provinciam_, as they term it;
And, to conclude, I am Protector now.
Now all is sure: the queen and Mortimer
Shall rule the realm, the king; and none rule us.
Mine enemies will I plague, my friends advance;
And what I list command who dare control?
Major sum quàm cui possit fortuna nocere;
And that this be the coronation-day,
It pleaseth me and Isabel the queen. [_Trumpets within._
The trumpets sound; I must go take my place.

Enter KING EDWARD THE THIRD, QUEEN ISABELLA, _the_
ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, Champion, _and_ Nobles.

Archb. of Cant. Long live King Edward, by the grace of God
King of England and Lord of Ireland!
Cham. If any Christian, Heathen, Turk, or Jew,
Dares but affirm that Edward's not true king,
And will avouch his saying with the sword,
I am the Champion that will combat him.
Y. Mor. None comes: sound, trumpets! [_Trumpets._
K. Edw. Third. Champion, here's to thee. [_Gives purse._
Q. Isab. Lord Mortimer, now take him to your charge.

Enter Soldiers _with_ KENT _prisoner._

Y. Mor. What traitor have we there with blades and bills?
 First Sold. Edmund the Earl of Kent.
 K. Edw. Third. What hath he done?
 First Sold. 'A would have taken the king away perforce,
 As we were bringing him to Killingworth.
 Y. Mor. Did you attempt his rescue, Edmund? speak.
 Kent. Mortimer, I did: he is our king,
 And thou compell'st this prince to wear the crown.
 Y. Mor. Strike off his head: he shall have martial law.
 Kent. Strike off my head! base traitor, I defy thee!
 K. Edw. Third. My lord, he is my uncle, and shall live.
 Y. Mor. My lord, he is your enemy, and shall die.
 Kent. Stay, villains!
 K. Edw. Third. Sweet mother, if I cannot pardon him,
 Entreat my Lord Protector for his life.
 Q. Isab. Son, be content: I dare not speak a word.
 K. Edw. Third. Nor I; and yet methinks I should command:
 But, seeing I cannot, I'll entreat for him.--
 My lord, if you will let my uncle live,
 I will requite it when I come to age.
 Y. Mor. 'Tis for your highness' good and for the realm's.--
 How often shall I bid you bear him hence?
 Kent. Art thou king? must I die at thy command?
 Y. Mor. At our command.--Once more, away with him!
 Kent. Let me but stay and speak; I will not go:
 Either my brother or his son is king,
 And none of both them thirst for Edmund's blood:
 And therefore, soldiers, whither will you hale me?
 [_Soldiers hale Kent away, and carry him to be beheaded._
 K. Edw. Third. What safety may I look for at his hands,
 If that my uncle shall be murder'd thus?
 Q. Isab. Fear not, sweet boy; I'll guard thee from thy foes:
 Had Edmund liv'd, he would have sought thy death.
 Come, son, we'll ride a-hunting in the park.
 K. Edw. Third. And shall my uncle Edmund ride with us?
 Q. Isab. He is a traitor; think not on him: come. [_Exeunt._

Enter MATREVIS _and_ GURNEY.

Mat. Gurney, I wonder the king dies not,
 Being in a vault up to the knees in water,
 To which the channels of the castle run,
 From whence a damp continually ariseth,
 That were enough to poison any man,
 Much more a king, brought up so tenderly.
 Gur. And so do I, Matrevis: yesternight
 I open'd but the door to throw him meat,
 And I was almost stifled with the savour.
 Mat. He hath a body able to endure

More than we can inflict: and therefore now
Let us assail his mind another while.
Gur. Send for him out thence, and I will anger him.
Mat. But stay; who's this?

Enter LIGHTBORN.

Light. My Lord Protector greets you. [_Gives letter._
Gur. What's there? I know not how to construe it.
Mat. Gurney, it was left unpointed for the nonce;
Edwardum occidere nolite timere,
That's his meaning.
Light. Know you this token? I must have the king. [_Gives token._
Mat. Ay, stay a while; thou shalt have answer straight.--
This villain's sent to make away the king.
Gur. I thought as much.
Mat. And, when the murder's done,
See how he must be handled for his labour,--
Pereat iste! Let him have the king;
What else?--Here is the keys, this is the lake:
Do as you are commanded by my lord.
Light. I know what I must do. Get you away:
Yet be not far off; I shall need your help:
See that in the next room I have a fire,
And get me a spit, and let it be red-hot.
Mat. Very well.
Gur. Need you anything besides?
Light. What else? a table and a feather-bed.
Gur. That's all?
Light. Ay, ay: so, when I call you, bring it in.
Mat. Fear not thou that.
Gur. Here's a light to go into the dungeon.
[_Gives light to Lightborn, and then exit with Matrevis._
Light. So, now.
Must I about this gear: ne'er was there any
So finely handled as this king shall be.--
Foh, here's a place indeed with all my heart!
K. Edw. Who's there? what light is that? wherefore com'st thou?
Light. To comfort you, and bring you joyful news.
K. Edw. Small comfort finds poor Edward in thy looks:
Villain, I know thou com'st to murder me.
Light. To murder you, my most gracious lord?
Far is it from my heart to do you harm.
The queen sent me to see how you were us'd,
For she relents at this your misery:
And what eye can refrain from shedding tears,
To see a king in this most piteous state?
K. Edw. Weep'st thou already? list a while to me,
And then thy heart, were it as Gurney's is,
Or as Matrevis', hewn from the Caucasus,

Yet will it melt ere I have done my tale.
This dungeon where they keep me is the sink
Wherein the filth of all the castle falls.

Light. O villains!

K. Edw. And there, in mire and puddle, have I stood
This ten days' space; and, lest that I should sleep,
One plays continually upon a drum;
They give me bread and water, being a king;
So that, for want of sleep and sustenance,
My mind's distemper'd, and my body's numb'd,
And whether I have limbs or no I know not.
O, would my blood dropp'd out from every vein,
As doth this water from my tatter'd robes!
Tell Isabel the queen, I look'd not thus,
When for her sake I ran at tilt in France,
And there unhors'd the Duke of Cleremont.

Light. O, speak no more, my lord! this breaks my heart.
Lie on this bed, and rest yourself a while.

K. Edw. These looks of thine can harbour naught but death;
I see my tragedy written in thy brows.
Yet stay a while; forbear thy bloody hand,
And let me see the stroke before it comes,
That even then when I shall lose my life,
My mind may be more steadfast on my God.

Light. What means your highness to mistrust me thus?

K. Edw. What mean'st thou to dissemble with me thus?

Light. These hands were never stain'd with innocent blood,
Nor shall they now be tainted with a king's.

K. Edw. Forgive my thought for having such a thought.
One jewel have I left; receive thou this: [_Gives jewel._]
Still fear I, and I know not what's the cause,
But every joint shakes as I give it thee.
O, if thou harbour'st murder in thy heart,
Let this gift change thy mind, and save thy soul!
Know that I am a king: O, at that name
I feel a hell of grief! where is my crown?
Gone, gone! and do I [still] remain alive?

Light. You're overwatch'd, my lord: lie down and rest.

K. Edw. But that grief keeps me waking, I should sleep;
For not these ten days have these eye-lids clos'd.
Now, as I speak, they fall; and yet with fear
Open again. O, wherefore sitt'st thou here?

Light. If you mistrust me, I'll be gone, my lord.

K. Edw. No, no; for, if thou mean'st to murder me,
Thou wilt return again; and therefore stay. [_Sleeps._]

Light. He sleeps.

K. Edw. [_waking_] O, let me not die yet! O, stay a while!

Light. How now, my lord!

K. Edw. Something still buzzeth in mine ears,
And tells me, if I sleep, I never wake:

This fear is that which makes me tremble thus;
And therefore tell me, wherefore art thou come?
Light. To rid thee of thy life.--Matrevis, come!

Enter MATREVIS _and_ GURNEY.

K. Edw. I am too weak and feeble to resist.--
Assist me, sweet God, and receive my soul!
Light. Run for the table.
K. Edw. O, spare me, or despatch me in a trice!
[_Matrevis brings in a table. King Edward is murdered
by holding him down on the bed with the table, and
stamping on it._]
Light. So, lay the table down, and stamp on it,
But not too hard, lest that you bruise his body.
Mat. I fear me that this cry will raise the town,
And therefore let us take horse and away.
Light. Tell me, sirs, was it not bravely done?
Gur. Excellent well: take this for thy reward.
[_Stabs Lightborn, who dies._]
Come, let us cast the body in the moat,
And bear the king's to Mortimer our lord:
Away! [_Exeunt with the bodies._]

Enter the younger MORTIMER _and_ MATREVIS.

Y. Mor. Is't done, Matrevis, and the murderer dead?
Mat. Ay, my good lord: I would it were undone!
Y. Mor. Matrevis, if thou now grow'st penitent,
I'll be thy ghostly father; therefore choose,
Whether thou wilt be secret in this,
Or else die by the hand of Mortimer.
Mat. Gurney, my lord, is fled, and will, I fear,
Betray us both; therefore let me fly.
Y. Mor. Fly to the savages!
Mat. I humbly thank your honour. [_Exit._]
Y. Mor. As for myself, I stand as Jove's huge tree,
And others are but shrubs compar'd to me:
All tremble at my name, and I fear none:
Let's see who dare impeach me for his death!

Enter QUEEN ISABELLA.

Q. Isab. Ah, Mortimer, the king my son hath news,
His father's dead, and we have murder'd him!
Y. Mor. What if he have? the king is yet a child.
Q. Isab. Ay, but he tears his hair, and wrings his hands,
And vows to be reveng'd upon us both.
Into the council-chamber he is gone,
To crave the aid and succour of his peers.

Ay me, see where he comes, and they with him!
Now, Mortimer, begins our tragedy.

Enter KING EDWARD THE THIRD, Lords, _and_ Attendants.

First Lord. Fear not, my lord; know that you are a king.

K. Edw. Third. Villain!--

Y. Mor. Ho, now, my lord!

K. Edw. Third. Think not that I am frighted with thy words:

My father's murder'd through thy treachery;
And thou shalt die, and on his mournful hearse
Thy hateful and accursed head shall lie,
To witness to the world that by thy means
His kingly body was too soon interr'd.

Q. Isab. Weep not, sweet son.

K. Edw. Third. Forbid not me to weep; he was my father;

And had you lov'd him half so well as I,
You could not bear his death thus patiently:
But you, I fear, conspir'd with Mortimer.

First Lord. Why speak you not unto my lord the king?

Y. Mor. Because I think scorn to be accus'd.

Who is the man dares say I murder'd him?

K. Edw. Third. Traitor, in me my loving father speaks,
And plainly saith, 'twas thou that murder'dst him.

Y. Mor. But hath your grace no other proof than this?

K. Edw. Third. Yes, if this be the hand of Mortimer.

[_Showing letter._]

Y. Mor. False Gurney hath betray'd me and himself.

[_Aside to Queen Isabella._]

Q. Isab. I fear'd as much: murder can not be hid.

Y. Mor. It is my hand; what gather you by this?

K. Edw. Third. That thither thou didst send a murderer.

Y. Mor. What murderer? bring forth the man I sent.

K. Edw. Third. Ah, Mortimer, thou know'st that he is slain!

And so shalt thou be too.--Why stays he here?

Bring him unto a hurdle, drag him forth;

Hang him, I say, and set his quarters up:

And bring his head back presently to me.

Q. Isab. For my sake, sweet son, pity Mortimer!

Y. Mor. Madam, entreat not: I will rather die

Than sue for life unto a paltry boy.

K. Edw. Third. Hence with the traitor, with the murderer!

Y. Mor. Base Fortune, now I see, that in thy wheel

There is a point, to which when men aspire,

They tumble headlong down: that point I touch'd,

And, seeing there was no place to mount up higher,

Why should I grieve at my declining fall?--

Farewell, fair queen: weep not for Mortimer,

That scorns the world, and, as a traveller,

Goes to discover countries yet unknown.

K. Edw. Third. What, suffer you the traitor to delay?
[_Exit the younger Mortimer with First Lord and
some of the Attendants._
Q. Isab. As thou receivest thy life from me,
Spill not the blood of gentle Mortimer!
K. Edw. Third. This argues that you spilt my father's blood,
Else would you not entreat for Mortimer.
Q. Isab. I spill his blood! no.
K. Edw. Third. Ay, madam, you; for so the rumour runs.
Q. Isab. That rumour is untrue: for loving thee,
Is this report rais'd on poor Isabel.
K. Edw. Third. I do not think her so unnatural.
Sec. Lord. My lord, I fear me it will prove too true.
K. Edw. Third. Mother, you are suspected for his death
And therefore we commit you to the Tower,
Till further trial may be made thereof.
If you be guilty, though I be your son,
Think not to find me slack or pitiful.
Q. Isab. Nay, to my death; for too long have I liv'd,
Whenas my son thinks to abridge my days.
K. Edw. Third. Away with her! her words enforce these tears,
And I shall pity her, if she speak again.
Q. Isab. Shall I not mourn for my beloved lord?
And with the rest accompany him to his grave.
Sec. Lord. Thus, madam, 'tis the king's will you shall hence.
Q. Isab. He hath forgotten me: stay; I am his mother.
Sec. Lord. That boots not; therefore, gentle madam, go.
Q. Isab. Then come, sweet death, and rid me of this grief!
[_Exit with Second Lord and some of the Attendants._

Re-enter First Lord, _with the head of the younger_
MORTIMER.

First Lord. My lord, here is the head of Mortimer.
K. Edw. Third. Go fetch my father's hearse, where it shall lie;
And bring my funeral robes. [_Exeunt Attendants._
Accursed head,
Could I have rul'd thee then, as I do now,
Thou hadst not hatch'd this monstrous treachery!--
Here comes the hearse: help me to mourn, my lords.

Re-enter Attendants, _with the hearse and funeral robes._

Sweet father, here unto thy murder'd ghost
I offer up the wicked traitor's head;
And let these tears, distilling from mine eyes,
Be witness of my grief and innocence. [_Exeunt._

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A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

Lord Illingworth
Sir John Pontefract
Lord Alfred Rufford
Mr. Kelvil, M.P.
The Ven. Archdeacon Daubeny, D.D.
Gerald Arbuthnot
Farquhar, Butler
Francis, Footman
Lady Hunstanton
Lady Caroline Pontefract
Lady Stutfield
Mrs. Allonby
Miss Hester Worsley
Alice, Maid
Mrs. Arbuthnot

THE SCENES OF THE PLAY

ACT I. The Terrace at Hunstanton Chase.
ACT II. The Drawing-room at Hunstanton Chase.
ACT III. The Hall at Hunstanton Chase.
ACT IV. Sitting-room in Mrs. Arbuthnot's House at Wrockley.

TIME: The Present.

PLACE: The Shires.

The action of the play takes place within twenty-four hours.

LONDON: HAYMARKET THEATRE

Lessee and Manager: Mr. H Beerbohm Tree
April 19th, 1893

Lord Illingworth, Mr. Tree
Sir John Pontefract, Mr. E. Holman Clark
Lord Alfred Rufford, Mr. Ernest Lawford
Mr. Kelvil, M.P., Mr. Charles Allan.
The Ven. Archdeacon Daubeny, D.D., Mr. Kemble

Gerald Arbuthnot, Mr. Terry
Farquhar, Butler, Mr. Hay
Francis, Footman, Mr. Montague
Lady Hunstanton, Miss Rose Leclercq
Lady Caroline Pontefract, Miss Le Thiere
Lady Stutfield, Miss Blanche Horlock
Mrs. Allonby, Mrs. Tree
Miss Hester Worsley, Miss Julia Neilson
Alice, Maid, Miss Kelly
Mrs. Arbuthnot, Mrs. Bernard-Beere

FIRST ACT

SCENE

Lawn in front of the terrace at Hunstanton.

[SIR JOHN and LADY CAROLINE PONTEFRAC, MISS WORSLEY, on chairs
under large yew tree.]

LADY CAROLINE. I believe this is the first English country house
you have stayed at, Miss Worsley?

HESTER. Yes, Lady Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE. You have no country houses, I am told, in America?

HESTER. We have not many.

LADY CAROLINE. Have you any country? What we should call country?

HESTER. [Smiling.] We have the largest country in the world, Lady
Caroline. They used to tell us at school that some of our states
are as big as France and England put together.

LADY CAROLINE. Ah! you must find it very draughty, I should fancy.
[To SIR JOHN.] John, you should have your muffler. What is the
use of my always knitting mufflers for you if you won't wear them?

SIR JOHN. I am quite warm, Caroline, I assure you.

LADY CAROLINE. I think not, John. Well, you couldn't come to a
more charming place than this, Miss Worsley, though the house is
excessively damp, quite unpardonably damp, and dear Lady Hunstanton
is sometimes a little lax about the people she asks down here. [To
SIR JOHN.] Jane mixes too much. Lord Illingworth, of course, is a

man of high distinction. It is a privilege to meet him. And that member of Parliament, Mr. Kettle -

SIR JOHN. Kelvil, my love, Kelvil.

LADY CAROLINE. He must be quite respectable. One has never heard his name before in the whole course of one's life, which speaks volumes for a man, nowadays. But Mrs. Allonby is hardly a very suitable person.

HESTER. I dislike Mrs. Allonby. I dislike her more than I can say.

LADY CAROLINE. I am not sure, Miss Worsley, that foreigners like yourself should cultivate likes or dislikes about the people they are invited to meet. Mrs. Allonby is very well born. She is a niece of Lord Brancaster's. It is said, of course, that she ran away twice before she was married. But you know how unfair people often are. I myself don't believe she ran away more than once.

HESTER. Mr. Arbuthnot is very charming.

LADY CAROLINE. Ah, yes! the young man who has a post in a bank. Lady Hunstanton is most kind in asking him here, and Lord Illingworth seems to have taken quite a fancy to him. I am not sure, however, that Jane is right in taking him out of his position. In my young days, Miss Worsley, one never met any one in society who worked for their living. It was not considered the thing.

HESTER. In America those are the people we respect most.

LADY CAROLINE. I have no doubt of it.

HESTER. Mr. Arbuthnot has a beautiful nature! He is so simple, so sincere. He has one of the most beautiful natures I have ever come across. It is a privilege to meet HIM.

LADY CAROLINE. It is not customary in England, Miss Worsley, for a young lady to speak with such enthusiasm of any person of the opposite sex. English women conceal their feelings till after they are married. They show them then.

HESTER. Do you, in England, allow no friendship to exist between a young man and a young girl?

[Enter LADY HUNSTANTON, followed by Footman with shawls and a cushion.]

LADY CAROLINE. We think it very inadvisable. Jane, I was just

saying what a pleasant party you have asked us to meet. You have a wonderful power of selection. It is quite a gift.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Dear Caroline, how kind of you! I think we all do fit in very nicely together. And I hope our charming American visitor will carry back pleasant recollections of our English country life. [To Footman.] The cushion, there, Francis. And my shawl. The Shetland. Get the Shetland. [Exit Footman for shawl.]

[Enter GERALD ARBUTHNOT.]

GERALD. Lady Hunstanton, I have such good news to tell you. Lord Illingworth has just offered to make me his secretary.

LADY HUNSTANTON. His secretary? That is good news indeed, Gerald. It means a very brilliant future in store for you. Your dear mother will be delighted. I really must try and induce her to come up here to-night. Do you think she would, Gerald? I know how difficult it is to get her to go anywhere.

GERALD. Oh! I am sure she would, Lady Hunstanton, if she knew Lord Illingworth had made me such an offer.

[Enter Footman with shawl.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. I will write and tell her about it, and ask her to come up and meet him. [To Footman.] Just wait, Francis. [Writes letter.]

LADY CAROLINE. That is a very wonderful opening for so young a man as you are, Mr. Arbuthnot.

GERALD. It is indeed, Lady Caroline. I trust I shall be able to show myself worthy of it.

LADY CAROLINE. I trust so.

GERALD. [To HESTER.] YOU have not congratulated me yet, Miss Worsley.

HESTER. Are you very pleased about it?

GERALD. Of course I am. It means everything to me - things that were out of the reach of hope before may be within hope's reach now.

HESTER. Nothing should be out of the reach of hope. Life is a hope.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I fancy, Caroline, that Diplomacy is what Lord

Illingworth is aiming at. I heard that he was offered Vienna. But that may not be true.

LADY CAROLINE. I don't think that England should be represented abroad by an unmarried man, Jane. It might lead to complications.

LADY HUNSTANTON. You are too nervous, Caroline. Believe me, you are too nervous. Besides, Lord Illingworth may marry any day. I was in hopes he would have married lady Kelso. But I believe he said her family was too large. Or was it her feet? I forget which. I regret it very much. She was made to be an ambassador's wife.

LADY CAROLINE. She certainly has a wonderful faculty of remembering people's names, and forgetting their faces.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Well, that is very natural, Caroline, is it not? [To Footman.] Tell Henry to wait for an answer. I have written a line to your dear mother, Gerald, to tell her your good news, and to say she really must come to dinner.

[Exit Footman.]

GERALD. That is awfully kind of you, Lady Hunstanton. [To HESTER.] Will you come for a stroll, Miss Worsley?

HESTER. With pleasure [Exit with GERALD.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. I am very much gratified at Gerald Arbuthnot's good fortune. He is quite a PROTEGE of mine. And I am particularly pleased that Lord Illingworth should have made the offer of his own accord without my suggesting anything. Nobody likes to be asked favours. I remember poor Charlotte Pagden making herself quite unpopular one season, because she had a French governess she wanted to recommend to every one.

LADY CAROLINE. I saw the governess, Jane. Lady Pagden sent her to me. It was before Eleanor came out. She was far too good-looking to be in any respectable household. I don't wonder Lady Pagden was so anxious to get rid of her.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, that explains it.

LADY CAROLINE. John, the grass is too damp for you. You had better go and put on your overshoes at once.

SIR JOHN. I am quite comfortable, Caroline, I assure you.

LADY CAROLINE. You must allow me to be the best judge of that, John. Pray do as I tell you.

[SIR JOHN gets up and goes off.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. You spoil him, Caroline, you do indeed!

[Enter MRS. ALLONBY and LADY STUTFIELD.]

[To MRS. ALLONBY.] Well, dear, I hope you like the park. It is said to be well timbered.

MRS. ALLONBY. The trees are wonderful, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY STUTFIELD. Quite, quite wonderful.

MRS. ALLONBY. But somehow, I feel sure that if I lived in the country for six months, I should become so unsophisticated that no one would take the slightest notice of me.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I assure you, dear, that the country has not that effect at all. Why, it was from Melthorpe, which is only two miles from here, that Lady Belton eloped with Lord Fethersdale. I remember the occurrence perfectly. Poor Lord Belton died three days afterwards of joy, or gout. I forget which. We had a large party staying here at the time, so we were all very much interested in the whole affair.

MRS. ALLONBY. I think to elope is cowardly. It's running away from danger. And danger has become so rare in modern life.

LADY CAROLINE. As far as I can make out, the young women of the present day seem to make it the sole object of their lives to be always playing with fire.

MRS. ALLONBY. The one advantage of playing with fire, Lady Caroline, is that one never gets even singed. It is the people who don't know how to play with it who get burned up.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes; I see that. It is very, very helpful.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I don't know how the world would get on with such a theory as that, dear Mrs. Allonby.

LADY STUTFIELD. Ah! The world was made for men and not for women.

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh, don't say that, Lady Stutfield. We have a much better time than they have. There are far more things forbidden to us than are forbidden to them.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes; that is quite, quite true. I had not thought of that.

[Enter SIR JOHN and MR. KELVIL.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Well, Mr. Kelvil, have you got through your work?

KELVIL. I have finished my writing for the day, Lady Hunstanton. It has been an arduous task. The demands on the time of a public man are very heavy nowadays, very heavy indeed. And I don't think they meet with adequate recognition.

LADY CAROLINE. John, have you got your overshoes on?

SIR JOHN. Yes, my love.

LADY CAROLINE. I think you had better come over here, John. It is more sheltered.

SIR JOHN. I am quite comfortable, Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE. I think not, John. You had better sit beside me.
[SIR JOHN rises and goes across.]

LADY STUTFIELD. And what have you been writing about this morning, Mr. Kelvil?

KELVIL. On the usual subject, Lady Stutfield. On Purity.

LADY STUTFIELD. That must be such a very, very interesting thing to write about.

KELVIL. It is the one subject of really national importance, nowadays, Lady Stutfield. I purpose addressing my constituents on the question before Parliament meets. I find that the poorer classes of this country display a marked desire for a higher ethical standard.

LADY STUTFIELD. How quite, quite nice of them.

LADY CAROLINE. Are you in favour of women taking part in politics, Mr. Kettle?

SIR JOHN. Kelvil, my love, Kelvil.

KELVIL. The growing influence of women is the one reassuring thing in our political life, Lady Caroline. Women are always on the side of morality, public and private.

LADY STUTFIELD. It is so very, very gratifying to hear you say that.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, yes! - the moral qualities in women - that is the important thing. I am afraid, Caroline, that dear Lord Illingworth doesn't value the moral qualities in women as much as he should.

[Enter LORD ILLINGWORTH.]

LADY STUTFIELD. The world says that Lord Illingworth is very, very wicked.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. But what world says that, Lady Stutfield? It must be the next world. This world and I are on excellent terms.
[Sits down beside MRS. ALLONBY.]

LADY STUTFIELD. Every one I know says you are very, very wicked.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is perfectly monstrous the way people go about, nowadays, saying things against one behind one's back that are absolutely and entirely true.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Dear Lord Illingworth is quite hopeless, Lady Stutfield. I have given up trying to reform him. It would take a Public Company with a Board of Directors and a paid Secretary to do that. But you have the secretary already, Lord Illingworth, haven't you? Gerald Arbuthnot has told us of his good fortune; it is really most kind of you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Oh, don't say that, Lady Hunstanton. Kind is a dreadful word. I took a great fancy to young Arbuthnot the moment I met him, and he'll be of considerable use to me in something I am foolish enough to think of doing.

LADY HUNSTANTON. He is an admirable young man. And his mother is one of my dearest friends. He has just gone for a walk with our pretty American. She is very pretty, is she not?

LADY CAROLINE. Far too pretty. These American girls carry off all the good matches. Why can't they stay in their own country? They are always telling us it is the Paradise of women.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is, Lady Caroline. That is why, like Eve, they are so extremely anxious to get out of it.

LADY CAROLINE. Who are Miss Worsley's parents?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. American women are wonderfully clever in concealing their parents.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear Lord Illingworth, what do you mean? Miss Worsley, Caroline, is an orphan. Her father was a very wealthy

millionaire or philanthropist, or both, I believe, who entertained my son quite hospitably, when he visited Boston. I don't know how he made his money, originally.

KELVIL. I fancy in American dry goods.

LADY HUNSTANTON. What are American dry goods?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. American novels.

LADY HUNSTANTON. How very singular! . . . Well, from whatever source her large fortune came, I have a great esteem for Miss Worsley. She dresses exceedingly well. All Americans do dress well. They get their clothes in Paris.

MRS. ALLONBY. They say, Lady Hunstanton, that when good Americans die they go to Paris.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Indeed? And when bad Americans die, where do they go to?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Oh, they go to America.

KELVIL. I am afraid you don't appreciate America, Lord Illingworth. It is a very remarkable country, especially considering its youth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. The youth of America is their oldest tradition. It has been going on now for three hundred years. To hear them talk one would imagine they were in their first childhood. As far as civilisation goes they are in their second.

KELVIL. There is undoubtedly a great deal of corruption in American politics. I suppose you allude to that?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I wonder.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Politics are in a sad way everywhere, I am told. They certainly are in England. Dear Mr. Cardew is ruining the country. I wonder Mrs. Cardew allows him. I am sure, Lord Illingworth, you don't think that uneducated people should be allowed to have votes?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I think they are the only people who should.

KELVIL. Do you take no side then in modern politics, Lord Illingworth?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. One should never take sides in anything, Mr. Kelvil. Taking sides is the beginning of sincerity, and

earnestness follows shortly afterwards, and the human being becomes a bore. However, the House of Commons really does very little harm. You can't make people good by Act of Parliament, - that is something.

KELVIL. You cannot deny that the House of Commons has always shown great sympathy with the sufferings of the poor.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. That is its special vice. That is the special vice of the age. One should sympathise with the joy, the beauty, the colour of life. The less said about life's sores the better, Mr. Kelvil.

KELVIL. Still our East End is a very important problem.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Quite so. It is the problem of slavery. And we are trying to solve it by amusing the slaves.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Certainly, a great deal may be done by means of cheap entertainments, as you say, Lord Illingworth. Dear Dr. Daubeney, our rector here, provides, with the assistance of his curates, really admirable recreations for the poor during the winter. And much good may be done by means of a magic lantern, or a missionary, or some popular amusement of that kind.

LADY CAROLINE. I am not at all in favour of amusements for the poor, Jane. Blankets and coals are sufficient. There is too much love of pleasure amongst the upper classes as it is. Health is what we want in modern life. The tone is not healthy, not healthy at all.

KELVIL. You are quite right, Lady Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE. I believe I am usually right.

MRS. ALLONBY. Horrid word 'health.'

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Silliest word in our language, and one knows so well the popular idea of health. The English country gentleman galloping after a fox - the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable.

KELVIL. May I ask, Lord Illingworth, if you regard the House of Lords as a better institution than the House of Commons?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. A much better institution, of course. We in the House of Lords are never in touch with public opinion. That makes us a civilised body.

KELVIL. Are you serious in putting forward such a view?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Quite serious, Mr. Kelvil. [To MRS. ALLONBY.]
Vulgar habit that is people have nowadays of asking one, after one
has given them an idea, whether one is serious or not. Nothing is
serious except passion. The intellect is not a serious thing, and
never has been. It is an instrument on which one plays, that is
all. The only serious form of intellect I know is the British
intellect. And on the British intellect the illiterates play the
drum.

LADY HUNSTANTON. What are you saying, Lord Illingworth, about the
drum?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I was merely talking to Mrs. Allonby about the
leading articles in the London newspapers.

LADY HUNSTANTON. But do you believe all that is written in the
newspapers?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I do. Nowadays it is only the unreadable that
occurs. [Rises with MRS. ALLONBY.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Are you going, Mrs. Allonby?

MRS. ALLONBY. Just as far as the conservatory. Lord Illingworth
told me this morning that there was an orchid there m beautiful as
the seven deadly sins.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear, I hope there is nothing of the kind. I
will certainly speak to the gardener.

[Exit MRS. ALLONBY and LORD ILLINGWORTH.]

LADY CAROLINE. Remarkable type, Mrs. Allonby.

LADY HUNSTANTON. She lets her clever tongue run away with her
sometimes.

LADY CAROLINE. Is that the only thing, Jane, Mrs. Allonby allows
to run away with her?

LADY HUNSTANTON. I hope so, Caroline, I am sure.

[Enter LORD ALFRED.]

Dear Lord Alfred, do join us. [LORD ALFRED sits down beside LADY
STUTFIELD.]

LADY CAROLINE. You believe good of every one, Jane. It is a great
fault.

LADY STUTFIELD. Do you really, really think, Lady Caroline, that one should believe evil of every one?

LADY CAROLINE. I think it is much safer to do so, Lady Stutfield. Until, of course, people are found out to be good. But that requires a great deal of investigation nowadays.

LADY STUTFIELD. But there is so much unkind scandal in modern life.

LADY CAROLINE. Lord Illingworth remarked to me last night at dinner that the basis of every scandal is an absolutely immoral certainty.

KELVIL. Lord Illingworth is, of course, a very brilliant man, but he seems to me to be lacking in that fine faith in the nobility and purity of life which is so important in this century.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes, quite, quite important, is it not?

KELVIL. He gives me the impression of a man who does not appreciate the beauty of our English home-life. I would say that he was tainted with foreign ideas on the subject.

LADY STUTFIELD. There is nothing, nothing like the beauty of home-life, is there?

KELVIL. It is the mainstay of our moral system in England, Lady Stutfield. Without it we would become like our neighbours.

LADY STUTFIELD. That would be so, so sad, would it not?

KELVIL. I am afraid, too, that Lord Illingworth regards woman simply as a toy. Now, I have never regarded woman as a toy. Woman is the intellectual helpmeet of man in public as in private life. Without her we should forget the true ideals. [Sits down beside LADY STUTFIELD.]

LADY STUTFIELD. I am so very, very glad to hear you say that.

LADY CAROLINE. You a married man, Mr. Kettle?

SIR JOHN. Kelvil, dear, Kelvil.

KELVIL. I am married, Lady Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE. Family?

KELVIL. Yes.

LADY CAROLINE. How many?

KELVIL. Eight.

[LADY STUTFIELD turns her attention to LORD ALFRED.]

LADY CAROLINE. Mrs. Kettle and the children are, I suppose, at the seaside? [SIR JOHN shrugs his shoulders.]

KELVIL. My wife is at the seaside with the children, Lady Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE. You will join them later on, no doubt?

KELVIL. If my public engagements permit me.

LADY CAROLINE. Your public life must be a great source of gratification to Mrs. Kettle.

SIR JOHN. Kelvil, my love, Kelvil.

LADY STUTFIELD. [To LORD ALFRED.] How very, very charming those gold-tipped cigarettes of yours are, Lord Alfred.

LORD ALFRED. They are awfully expensive. I can only afford them when I'm in debt.

LADY STUTFIELD. It must be terribly, terribly distressing to be in debt.

LORD ALFRED. One must have some occupation nowadays. If I hadn't my debts I shouldn't have anything to think about. All the chaps I know are in debt.

LADY STUTFIELD. But don't the people to whom you owe the money give you a great, great deal of annoyance?

[Enter Footman.]

LORD ALFRED. Oh, no, they write; I don't.

LADY STUTFIELD. How very, very strange.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, here is a letter, Caroline, from dear Mrs. Arbuthnot. She won't dine. I am so sorry. But she will come in the evening. I am very pleased indeed. She is one of the sweetest of women. Writes a beautiful hand, too, so large, so firm. [Hands letter to LADY CAROLINE.]

LADY CAROLINE. [Looking at it.] A little lacking in femininity, Jane. Femininity is the quality I admire most in women.

LADY HUNSTANTON. [Taking back letter and leaving it on table.] Oh! she is very feminine, Caroline, and so good too. You should hear what the Archdeacon says of her. He regards her as his right hand in the parish. [Footman speaks to her.] In the Yellow Drawing-room. Shall we all go in? Lady Stutfield, shall we go in to tea?

LADY STUTFIELD. With pleasure, Lady Hunstanton. [They rise and proceed to go off. SIR JOHN offers to carry LADY STUTFIELD'S cloak.]

LADY CAROLINE. John! If you would allow your nephew to look after Lady Stutfield's cloak, you might help me with my workbasket.

[Enter LORD ILLINGWORTH and MRS. ALLONBY.]

SIR JOHN. Certainly, my love. [Exeunt.]

MRS. ALLONBY. Curious thing, plain women are always jealous of their husbands, beautiful women never are!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Beautiful women never have time. They are always so occupied in being jealous of other people's husbands.

MRS. ALLONBY. I should have thought Lady Caroline would have grown tired of conjugal anxiety by this time! Sir John is her fourth!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. So much marriage is certainly not becoming. Twenty years of romance make a woman look like a ruin; but twenty years of marriage make her something like a public building.

MRS. ALLONBY. Twenty years of romance! Is there such a thing?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Not in our day. Women have become too brilliant. Nothing spoils a romance so much as a sense of humour in the woman.

MRS. ALLONBY. Or the want of it in the man.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You are quite right. In a Temple every one should be serious, except the thing that is worshipped.

MRS. ALLONBY. And that should be man?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Women kneel so gracefully; men don't.

MRS. ALLONBY. You are thinking of Lady Stutfield!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I assure you I have not thought of Lady Stutfield for the last quarter of an hour.

MRS. ALLONBY. Is she such a mystery?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. She is more than a mystery - she is a mood.

MRS. ALLONBY. Moods don't last.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is their chief charm.

[Enter HESTER and GERALD.]

GERALD. Lord Illingworth, every one has been congratulating me, Lady Hunstanton and Lady Caroline, and . . . every one. I hope I shall make a good secretary.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You will be the pattern secretary, Gerald.
[Talks to him.]

MRS. ALLONBY. You enjoy country life, Miss Worsley?

HESTER. Very much indeed.

MRS. ALLONBY. Don't find yourself longing for a London dinner-party?

HESTER. I dislike London dinner-parties.

MRS. ALLONBY. I adore them. The clever people never listen, and the stupid people never talk.

HESTER. I think the stupid people talk a great deal.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, I never listen!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. My dear boy, if I didn't like you I wouldn't have made you the offer. It is because I like you so much that I want to have you with me.

[Exit HESTER with GERALD.]

Charming fellow, Gerald Arbuthnot!

MRS. ALLONBY. He is very nice; very nice indeed. But I can't stand the American young lady.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Why?

MRS. ALLONBY. She told me yesterday, and in quite a loud voice too, that she was only eighteen. It was most annoying.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. One should never trust a woman who tells one her real age. A woman who would tell one that, would tell one anything.

MRS. ALLONBY. She is a Puritan besides -

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Ah, that is inexcusable. I don't mind plain women being Puritans. It is the only excuse they have for being plain. But she is decidedly pretty. I admire her immensely.
[Looks steadfastly at MRS. ALLONBY.]

MRS. ALLONBY. What a thoroughly bad man you must be!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What do you call a bad man?

MRS. ALLONBY. The sort of man who admires innocence.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. And a bad woman?

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh! the sort of woman a man never gets tired of.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You are severe - on yourself.

MRS. ALLONBY. Define us as a sex.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Sphinxes without secrets.

MRS. ALLONBY. Does that include the Puritan women?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Do you know, I don't believe in the existence of Puritan women? I don't think there is a woman in the world who would not be a little flattered if one made love to her. It is that which makes women so irresistibly adorable.

MRS. ALLONBY. You think there is no woman in the world who would object to being kissed?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Very few.

MRS. ALLONBY. Miss Worsley would not let you kiss her.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Are you sure?

MRS. ALLONBY. Quite.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What do you think she'd do if I kissed her?

MRS. ALLONBY. Either marry you, or strike you across the face with her glove. What would you do if she struck you across the face with her glove?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Fall in love with her, probably.

MRS. ALLONBY. Then it is lucky you are not going to kiss her!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Is that a challenge?

MRS. ALLONBY. It is an arrow shot into the air.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Don't you know that I always succeed in whatever I try?

MRS. ALLONBY. I am sorry to hear it. We women adore failures. They lean on us.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You worship successes. You cling to them.

MRS. ALLONBY. We are the laurels to hide their baldness.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. And they need you always, except at the moment of triumph.

MRS. ALLONBY. They are uninteresting then.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. How tantalising you are! [A pause.]

MRS. ALLONBY. Lord Illingworth, there is one thing I shall always like you for.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Only one thing? And I have so many bad qualities.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, don't be too conceited about them. You may lose them as you grow old.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I never intend to grow old. The soul is born old but grows young. That is the comedy of life.

MRS. ALLONBY. And the body is born young and grows old. That is life's tragedy.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Its comedy also, sometimes. But what is the mysterious reason why you will always like me?

MRS. ALLONBY. It is that you have never made love to me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I have never done anything else.

MRS. ALLONBY. Really? I have not noticed it.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. How fortunate! It might have been a tragedy for both of us.

MRS. ALLONBY. We should each have survived.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. One can survive everything nowadays, except death, and live down anything except a good reputation.

MRS. ALLONBY. Have you tried a good reputation?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is one of the many annoyances to which I have never been subjected.

MRS. ALLONBY. It may come.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Why do you threaten me?

MRS. ALLONBY. I will tell you when you have kissed the Puritan.

[Enter Footman.]

FRANCIS. Tea is served in the Yellow Drawing-room, my lord.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Tell her ladyship we are coming in.

FRANCIS. Yes, my lord.

[Exit.]

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Shall we go in to tea?

MRS. ALLONBY. Do you like such simple pleasures?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I adore simple pleasures. They are the last refuge of the complex. But, if you wish, let us stay here. Yes, let us stay here. The Book of Life begins with a man and a woman in a garden.

MRS. ALLONBY. It ends with Revelations.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You fence divinely. But the button has come of your foil.

MRS. ALLONBY. I have still the mask.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It makes your eyes lovelier.

MRS. ALLONBY. Thank you. Come.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. [Sees MRS. ARBUTHNOT'S letter on table, and takes it up and looks at envelope.] What a curious handwriting! It reminds me of the handwriting of a woman I used to know years ago.

MRS. ALLONBY. Who?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Oh! no one. No one in particular. A woman of no importance. [Throws letter down, and passes up the steps of the terrace with MRS. ALLONBY. They smile at each other.]

ACT DROP.

SECOND ACT

SCENE

Drawing-room at Hunstanton, after dinner, lamps lit. Door L.C.
Door R.C.

[Ladies seated on sofas.]

MRS. ALLONBY. What a comfort it is to have got rid of the men for a little!

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes; men persecute us dreadfully, don't they?

MRS. ALLONBY. Persecute us? I wish they did.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear!

MRS. ALLONBY. The annoying thing is that the wretches can be perfectly happy without us. That is why I think it is every woman's duty never to leave them alone for a single moment, except during this short breathing space after dinner; without which I believe we poor women would be absolutely worn to shadows.

[Enter Servants with coffee.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Worn to shadows, dear?

MRS. ALLONBY. Yes, Lady Hunstanton. It is such a strain keeping men up to the mark. They are always trying to escape from us.

LADY STUTFIELD. It seems to me that it is we who are always trying to escape from them. Men are so very, very heartless. They know their power and use it.

LADY CAROLINE. [Takes coffee from Servant.] What stuff and nonsense all this about men is! The thing to do is to keep men in their proper place.

MRS. ALLONBY. But what is their proper place, Lady Caroline?

LADY CAROLINE. Looking after their wives, Mrs. Allonby.

MRS. ALLONBY. [Takes coffee from Servant.] Really? And if they're not married?

LADY CAROLINE. If they are not married, they should be looking after a wife. It's perfectly scandalous the amount of bachelors who are going about society. There should be a law passed to compel them all to marry within twelve months.

LADY STUTFIELD. [Refuses coffee.] But if they're in love with some one who, perhaps, is tied to another?

LADY CAROLINE. In that case, Lady Stutfield, they should be married off in a week to some plain respectable girl, in order to teach them not to meddle with other people's property.

MRS. ALLONBY. I don't think that we should ever be spoken of as other people's property. All men are married women's property. That is the only true definition of what married women's property really is. But we don't belong to any one.

LADY STUTFIELD. Oh, I am so very, very glad to hear you say so.

LADY HUNSTANTON. But do you really think, dear Caroline, that legislation would improve matters in any way? I am told that, nowadays, all the married men live like bachelors, and all the bachelors like married men.

MRS. ALLONBY. I certainly never know one from the other.

LADY STUTFIELD. Oh, I think one can always know at once whether a man has home claims upon his life or not. I have noticed a very, very sad expression in the eyes of so many married men.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, all that I have noticed is that they are horribly tedious when they are good husbands, and abominably conceited when they are not.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Well, I suppose the type of husband has completely changed since my young days, but I'm bound to state that poor dear Hunstanton was the most delightful of creatures, and as good as gold.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, my husband is a sort of promissory note; I'm tired of meeting him.

LADY CAROLINE. But you renew him from time to time, don't you?

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh no, Lady Caroline. I have only had one husband as yet. I suppose you look upon me as quite an amateur.

LADY CAROLINE. With your views on life I wonder you married at all.

MRS. ALLONBY. So do I.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear child, I believe you are really very happy in your married life, but that you like to hide your happiness from others.

MRS. ALLONBY. I assure you I was horribly deceived in Ernest.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Oh, I hope not, dear. I knew his mother quite well. She was a Stratton, Caroline, one of Lord Crowland's daughters

LADY CAROLINE. Victoria Stratton? I remember her perfectly. A silly fair-haired woman with no chin.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, Ernest has a chin. He has a very strong chin, a square chin. Ernest's chin is far too square.

LADY STUTFIELD. But do you really think a man's chin can be too square? I think a man should look very, very strong, and that his chin should be quite, quite square.

MRS. ALLONBY. Then you should certainly know Ernest, Lady Stutfield. It is only fair to tell you beforehand he has got no conversation at all.

LADY STUTFIELD. I adore silent men.

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh, Ernest isn't silent. He talks the whole time. But he has got no conversation. What he talks about I don't know. I haven't listened to him for years.

LADY STUTFIELD. Have you never forgiven him then? How sad that seems! But all life is very, very sad, is it not?

MRS. ALLONBY. Life, Lady Stutfield, is simply a MAUVAIS QUART D'HEURE made up of exquisite moments.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes, there are moments, certainly. But was it something very, very wrong that Mr. Allonby did? Did he become angry with you, and say anything that was unkind or true?

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh dear, no. Ernest is invariably calm. That is one of the reasons he always gets on my nerves. Nothing is so aggravating as calmness. There is something positively brutal about the good temper of most modern men. I wonder we women stand it as well as we do.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes; men's good temper shows they are not so sensitive as we are, not so finely strung. It makes a great barrier often between husband and wife, does it not? But I would so much like to know what was the wrong thing Mr. Allonby did.

MRS. ALLONBY. Well, I will tell you, if you solemnly promise to tell everybody else.

LADY STUTFIELD. Thank you, thank you. I will make a point of repeating it.

MRS. ALLONBY. When Ernest and I were engaged, he swore to me positively on his knees that he had never loved any one before in the whole course of his life. I was very young at the time, so I didn't believe him, I needn't tell you. Unfortunately, however, I made no enquiries of any kind till after I had been actually married four or five months. I found out then that what he had told me was perfectly true. And that sort of thing makes a man so absolutely uninteresting.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear!

MRS. ALLONBY. Men always want to be a woman's first love. That is their clumsy vanity. We women have a more subtle instinct about things. What we like is to be a man's last romance.

LADY STUTFIELD. I see what you mean. It's very, very beautiful.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear child, you don't mean to tell me that you won't forgive your husband because he never loved any one else? Did you ever hear such a thing, Caroline? I am quite surprised.

LADY CAROLINE. Oh, women have become so highly educated, Jane, that nothing should surprise us nowadays, except happy marriages. They apparently are getting remarkably rare.

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh, they're quite out of date.

LADY STUTFIELD. Except amongst the middle classes, I have been told.

MRS. ALLONBY. How like the middle classes!

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes - is it not? - very, very like them.

LADY CAROLINE. If what you tell us about the middle classes is true, Lady Stutfield, it redounds greatly to their credit. It is much to be regretted that in our rank of life the wife should be so persistently frivolous, under the impression apparently that it is the proper thing to be. It is to that I attribute the unhappiness of so many marriages we all know of in society.

MRS. ALLONBY. Do you know, Lady Caroline, I don't think the frivolity of the wife has ever anything to do with it. More marriages are ruined nowadays by the common sense of the husband than by anything else. How can a woman be expected to be happy with a man who insists on treating her as if she were a perfectly rational being?

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear!

MRS. ALLONBY. Man, poor, awkward, reliable, necessary man belongs to a sex that has been rational for millions and millions of years. He can't help himself. It is in his race. The History of Woman is very different. We have always been picturesque protests against the mere existence of common sense. We saw its dangers from the first.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes, the common sense of husbands is certainly most, most trying. Do tell me your conception of the Ideal Husband. I think it would be so very, very helpful.

MRS. ALLONBY. The Ideal Husband? There couldn't be such a thing. The institution is wrong.

LADY STUTFIELD. The Ideal Man, then, in his relations to US.

LADY CAROLINE. He would probably be extremely realistic.

MRS. CAROLINE. The Ideal Man! Oh, the Ideal Man should talk to us as if we were goddesses, and treat us as if we were children. He should refuse all our serious requests, and gratify every one of our whims. He should encourage us to have caprices, and forbid us to have missions. He should always say much more than he means, and always mean much more than he says.

LADY HUNSTANTON. But how could he do both, dear?

MRS. ALLONBY. He should never run down other pretty women. That would show he had no taste, or make one suspect that he had too much. No; he should be nice about them all, but say that somehow they don't attract him.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes, that is always very, very pleasant to hear about other women.

MRS. ALLONBY. If we ask him a question about anything, he should give us an answer all about ourselves. He should invariably praise us for whatever qualities he knows we haven't got. But he should be pitiless, quite pitiless, in reproaching us for the virtues that we have never dreamed of possessing. He should never believe that we know the use of useful things. That would be unforgiveable. But he should shower on us everything we don't want.

LADY CAROLINE. As far as I can see, he is to do nothing but pay bills and compliments.

MRS. ALLONBY. He should persistently compromise us in public, and treat us with absolute respect when we are alone. And yet he should be always ready to have a perfectly terrible scene, whenever we want one, and to become miserable, absolutely miserable, at a moment's notice, and to overwhelm us with just reproaches in less than twenty minutes, and to be positively violent at the end of half an hour, and to leave us for ever at a quarter to eight, when we have to go and dress for dinner. And when, after that, one has seen him for really the last time, and he has refused to take back the little things he has given one, and promised never to communicate with one again, or to write one any foolish letters, he should be perfectly broken-hearted, and telegraph to one all day long, and send one little notes every half-hour by a private hansom, and dine quite alone at the club, so that every one should know how unhappy he was. And after a whole dreadful week, during which one has gone about everywhere with one's husband, just to show how absolutely lonely one was, he may be given a third last parting, in the evening, and then, if his conduct has been quite irreproachable, and one has behaved really badly to him, he should be allowed to admit that he has been entirely in the wrong, and when he has admitted that, it becomes a woman's duty to forgive, and one can do it all over again from the beginning, with variations.

LADY HUNSTANTON. How clever you are, my dear! You never mean a single word you say.

LADY STUTFIELD. Thank you, thank you. It has been quite, quite entrancing. I must try and remember it all. There are such a

number of details that are so very, very important.

LADY CAROLINE. But you have not told us yet what the reward of the Ideal Man is to be.

MRS. ALLONBY. His reward? Oh, infinite expectation. That is quite enough for him.

LADY STUTFIELD. But men are so terribly, terribly exacting, are they not?

MRS. ALLONBY. That makes no matter. One should never surrender.

LADY STUTFIELD. Not even to the Ideal Man?

MRS. ALLONBY. Certainly not to him. Unless, of course, one wants to grow tired of him.

LADY STUTFIELD. Oh! . . . yes. I see that. It is very, very helpful. Do you think, Mrs. Allonby, I shall ever meet the Ideal Man? Or are there more than one?

MRS. ALLONBY. There are just four in London, Lady Stutfield.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Oh, my dear!

MRS. ALLONBY. [Going over to her.] What has happened? Do tell me.

LADY HUNSTANTON [in a low voice] I had completely forgotten that the American young lady has been in the room all the time. I am afraid some of this clever talk may have shocked her a little.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, that will do her so much good!

LADY HUNSTANTON. Let us hope she didn't understand much. I think I had better go over and talk to her. [Rises and goes across to HESTER WORSLEY.] Well, dear Miss Worsley. [Sitting down beside her.] How quiet you have been in your nice little corner all this time! I suppose you have been reading a book? There are so many books here in the library.

HESTER. No, I have been listening to the conversation.

LADY HUNSTANTON. You mustn't believe everything that was said, you know, dear.

HESTER. I didn't believe any of it

LADY HUNSTANTON. That is quite right, dear.

HESTER. [Continuing.] I couldn't believe that any women could really hold such views of life as I have heard to-night from some of your guests. [An awkward pause.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. I hear you have such pleasant society in America. Quite like our own in places, my son wrote to me.

HESTER. There are cliques in America as elsewhere, Lady Hunstanton. But true American society consists simply of all the good women and good men we have in our country.

LADY HUNSTANTON. What a sensible system, and I dare say quite pleasant too. I am afraid in England we have too many artificial social barriers. We don't see as much as we should of the middle and lower classes.

HESTER. In America we have no lower classes.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Really? What a very strange arrangement!

MRS. ALLONBY. What is that dreadful girl talking about?

LADY STUTFIELD. She is painfully natural, is she not?

LADY CAROLINE. There are a great many things you haven't got in America, I am told, Miss Worsley. They say you have no ruins, and no curiosities.

MRS. ALLONBY. [To LADY STUTFIELD.] What nonsense! They have their mothers and their manners.

HESTER. The English aristocracy supply us with our curiosities, Lady Caroline. They are sent over to us every summer, regularly, in the steamers, and propose to us the day after they land. As for ruins, we are trying to build up something that will last longer than brick or stone. [Gets up to take her fan from table.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. What is that, dear? Ah, yes, an iron Exhibition, is it not, at that place that has the curious name?

HESTER. [Standing by table.] We are trying to build up life, Lady Hunstanton, on a better, truer, purer basis than life rests on here. This sounds strange to you all, no doubt. How could it sound other than strange? You rich people in England, you don't know how you are living. How could you know? You shut out from your society the gentle and the good. You laugh at the simple and the pure. Living, as you all do, on others and by them, you sneer at self-sacrifice, and if you throw bread to the poor, it is merely to keep them quiet for a season. With all your pomp and wealth and

art you don't know how to live - you don't even know that. You love the beauty that you can see and touch and handle, the beauty that you can destroy, and do destroy, but of the unseen beauty of life, of the unseen beauty of a higher life, you know nothing. You have lost life's secret. Oh, your English society seems to me shallow, selfish, foolish. It has blinded its eyes, and stopped its ears. It lies like a leper in purple. It sits like a dead thing smeared with gold. It is all wrong, all wrong.

LADY STUTFIELD. I don't think one should know of these things. It is not very, very nice, is it?

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear Miss Worsley, I thought you liked English society so much. You were such a success in it. And you were so much admired by the best people. I quite forget what Lord Henry Weston said of you - but it was most complimentary, and you know what an authority he is on beauty.

HESTER. Lord Henry Weston! I remember him, Lady Hunstanton. A man with a hideous smile and a hideous past. He is asked everywhere. No dinner-party is complete without him. What of those whose ruin is due to him? They are outcasts. They are nameless. If you met them in the street you would turn your head away. I don't complain of their punishment. Let all women who have sinned be punished.

[MRS. ARBUTHNOT enters from terrace behind in a cloak with a lace veil over her head. She hears the last words and starts.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear young lady!

HESTER. It is right that they should be punished, but don't let them be the only ones to suffer. If a man and woman have sinned, let them both go forth into the desert to love or loathe each other there. Let them both be branded. Set a mark, if you wish, on each, but don't punish the one and let the other go free. Don't have one law for men and another for women. You are unjust to women in England. And till you count what is a shame in a woman to be an infamy in a man, you will always be unjust, and Right, that pillar of fire, and Wrong, that pillar of cloud, will be made dim to your eyes, or be not seen at all, or if seen, not regarded

LADY CAROLINE. Might I, dear Miss Worsley, as you are standing up, ask you for my cotton that is just behind you? Thank you.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear Mrs. Arbuthnot! I am so pleased you have come up. But I didn't hear you announced.

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh, I came straight in from the terrace, Lady Hunstanton, just as I was. You didn't tell me you had a party.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Not a party. Only a few guests who are staying in the house, and whom you must know. Allow me. [Tries to help her. Rings bell.] Caroline, this is Mrs. Arbuthnot, one of my sweetest friends. Lady Caroline Pontefract, Lady Stutfield, Mrs. Allonby, and my young American friend, Miss Worsley, who has just been telling us all how wicked we are.

HESTER. I am afraid you think I spoke too strongly, Lady Hunstanton. But there are some things in England -

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear young lady, there was a great deal of truth, I dare say, in what you said, and you looked very pretty while you said it, which is much more important, Lord Illingworth would tell us. The only point where I thought you were a little hard was about Lady Caroline's brother, about poor Lord Henry. He is really such good company.

[Enter Footman.]

Take Mrs. Arbuthnot's things.

[Exit Footman with wraps.]

HESTER. Lady Caroline, I had no idea it was your brother. I am sorry for the pain I must have caused you - I -

LADY CAROLINE. My dear Miss Worsley, the only part of your little speech, if I may so term it, with which I thoroughly agreed, was the part about my brother. Nothing that you could possibly say could be too bad for him. I regard Henry as infamous, absolutely infamous. But I am bound to state, as you were remarking, Jane, that he is excellent company, and he has one of the best cooks in London, and after a good dinner one can forgive anybody, even one's own relations.

LADY HUNSTANTON [to MISS WORSLEY] Now, do come, dear, and make friends with Mrs. Arbuthnot. She is one of the good, sweet, simple people you told us we never admitted into society. I am sorry to say Mrs. Arbuthnot comes very rarely to me. But that is not my fault.

MRS. ALLONBY. What a bore it is the men staying so long after dinner! I expect they are saying the most dreadful things about us.

LADY STUTFIELD. Do you really think so?

MRS. ALLONBY. I was sure of it.

LADY STUTFIELD. How very, very horrid of them! Shall we go onto the terrace?

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh, anything to get away from the dowagers and the dowdies. [Rises and goes with LADY STUTFIELD to door L.C.] We are only going to look at the stars, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON. You will find a great many, dear, a great many. But don't catch cold. [To MRS. ARBUTHNOT.] We shall all miss Gerald so much, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. But has Lord Illingworth really offered to make Gerald his secretary?

LADY HUNSTANTON. Oh, yes! He has been most charming about it. He has the highest possible opinion of your boy. You don't know Lord Illingworth, I believe, dear.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I have never met him.

LADY HUNSTANTON. You know him by name, no doubt?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I am afraid I don't. I live so much out of the world, and see so few people. I remember hearing years ago of an old Lord Illingworth who lived in Yorkshire, I think.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, yes. That would be the last Earl but one. He was a very curious man. He wanted to marry beneath him. Or wouldn't, I believe. There was some scandal about it. The present Lord Illingworth is quite different. He is very distinguished. He does - well, he does nothing, which I am afraid our pretty American visitor here thinks very wrong of anybody, and I don't know that he cares much for the subjects in which you are so interested, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot. Do you think, Caroline, that Lord Illingworth is interested in the Housing of the Poor?

LADY CAROLINE. I should fancy not at all, Jane.

LADY HUNSTANTON. We all have our different tastes, have we not? But Lord Illingworth has a very high position, and there is nothing he couldn't get if he chose to ask for it. Of course, he is comparatively a young man still, and he has only come to his title within - how long exactly is it, Caroline, since Lord Illingworth succeeded?

LADY CAROLINE. About four years, I think, Jane. I know it was the same year in which my brother had his last exposure in the evening newspapers.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, I remember. That would be about four years

ago. Of course, there were a great many people between the present Lord Illingworth and the title, Mrs. Arbuthnot. There was - who was there, Caroline?

LADY CAROLINE. There was poor Margaret's baby. You remember how anxious she was to have a boy, and it was a boy, but it died, and her husband died shortly afterwards, and she married almost immediately one of Lord Ascot's sons, who, I am told, beats her.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, that is in the family, dear, that is in the family. And there was also, I remember, a clergyman who wanted to be a lunatic, or a lunatic who wanted to be a clergyman, I forget which, but I know the Court of Chancery investigated the matter, and decided that he was quite sane. And I saw him afterwards at poor Lord Plumstead's with straws in his hair, or something very odd about him. I can't recall what. I often regret, Lady Caroline, that dear Lady Cecilia never lived to see her son get the title.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Lady Cecilia?

LADY HUNSTANTON. Lord Illingworth's mother, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot, was one of the Duchess of Jerningham's pretty daughters, and she married Sir Thomas Harford, who wasn't considered a very good match for her at the time, though he was said to be the handsomest man in London. I knew them all quite intimately, and both the sons, Arthur and George.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It was the eldest son who succeeded, of course, Lady Hunstanton?

LADY HUNSTANTON. No, dear, he was killed in the hunting field. Or was it fishing, Caroline? I forget. But George came in for everything. I always tell him that no younger son has ever had such good luck as he has had.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Lady Hunstanton, I want to speak to Gerald at once. Might I see him? Can he be sent for?

LADY HUNSTANTON. Certainly, dear. I will send one of the servants into the dining-room to fetch him. I don't know what keeps the gentlemen so long. [Rings bell.] When I knew Lord Illingworth first as plain George Harford, he was simply a very brilliant young man about town, with not a penny of money except what poor dear Lady Cecilia gave him. She was quite devoted to him. Chiefly, I fancy, because he was on bad terms with his father. Oh, here is the dear Archdeacon. [To Servant.] It doesn't matter.

[Enter SIR JOHN and DOCTOR DAUBENY. SIR JOHN goes over to LADY STUTFIELD, DOCTOR DAUBENY to LADY HUNSTANTON.]

THE ARCHDEACON. Lord Illingworth has been most entertaining. I have never enjoyed myself more. [Sees MRS. ARBUTHNOT.] Ah, Mrs. Arbuthnot.

LADY HUNSTANTON. [To DOCTOR DAUBENY.] You see I have got Mrs. Arbuthnot to come to me at last.

THE ARCHDEACON. That is a great honour, Lady Hunstanton. Mrs. Daubeny will be quite jealous of you.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, I am so sorry Mrs. Daubeny could not come with you to-night. Headache as usual, I suppose.

THE ARCHDEACON. Yes, Lady Hunstanton; a perfect martyr. But she is happiest alone. She is happiest alone.

LADY CAROLINE. [To her husband.] John! [SIR JOHN goes over to his wife. DOCTOR DAUBENY talks to LADY HUNSTANTON and MRS. ARBUTHNOT.]

[MRS. ARBUTHNOT watches LORD ILLINGWORTH the whole time. He has passed across the room without noticing her, and approaches MRS. ALLONBY, who with LADY STUTFIELD is standing by the door looking on to the terrace.]

LORD ILLINGWORTH. How is the most charming woman in the world?

MRS. ALLONBY. [Taking LADY STUTFIELD by the hand.] We are both quite well, thank you, Lord Illingworth. But what a short time you have been in the dining-room! It seems as if we had only just left.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I was bored to death. Never opened my lips the whole time. Absolutely longing to come in to you.

MRS. ALLONBY. You should have. The American girl has been giving us a lecture.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Really? All Americans lecture, I believe. I suppose it is something in their climate. What did she lecture about?

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh, Puritanism, of course.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I am going to convert her, am I not? How long do you give me?

MRS. ALLONBY. A week.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. A week is more than enough.

[Enter GERALD and LORD ALFRED.]

GERALD. [Going to MRS. ARBUTHNOT.] Dear mother!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Gerald, I don't feel at all well. See me home, Gerald. I shouldn't have come.

GERALD. I am so sorry, mother. Certainly. But you must know Lord Illingworth first. [Goes across room.]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Not to-night, Gerald.

GERALD. Lord Illingworth, I want you so much to know my mother.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. With the greatest pleasure. [To MRS. ALLONBY.] I'll be back in a moment. People's mothers always bore me to death. All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy.

MRS. ALLONBY. No man does. That is his.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What a delightful mood you are in to-night! [Turns round and goes across with GERALD to MRS. ARBUTHNOT. When he sees her, he starts back in wonder. Then slowly his eyes turn towards GERALD.]

GERALD. Mother, this is Lord Illingworth, who has offered to take me as his private secretary. [MRS. ARBUTHNOT bows coldly.] It is a wonderful opening for me, isn't it? I hope he won't be disappointed in me, that is all. You'll thank Lord Illingworth, mother, won't you?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Lord Illingworth in very good, I am sure, to interest himself in you for the moment.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. [Putting his hand on GERALD's shoulder.] Oh, Gerald and I are great friends already, Mrs . . . Arbuthnot.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. There can be nothing in common between you and my son, Lord Illingworth.

GERALD. Dear mother, how can you say so? Of course Lord Illingworth is awfully clever and that sort of thing. There is nothing Lord Illingworth doesn't know.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. My dear boy!

GERALD. He knows more about life than any one I have ever met. I

feel an awful dunder when I am with you, Lord Illingworth. Of course, I have had so few advantages. I have not been to Eton or Oxford like other chaps. But Lord Illingworth doesn't seem to mind that. He has been awfully good to me, mother.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Lord Illingworth may change his mind. He may not really want you as his secretary.

GERALD. Mother!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. You must remember, as you said yourself, you have had so few advantages.

MRS. ALLONBY. Lord Illingworth, I want to speak to you for a moment. Do come over.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Will you excuse me, Mrs. Arbuthnot? Now, don't let your charming mother make any more difficulties, Gerald. The thing is quite settled, isn't it?

GERALD. I hope so. [LORD ILLINGWORTH goes across to MRS. ARBUTHNOT.]

MRS. ALLONBY. I thought you were never going to leave the lady in black velvet.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. She is excessively handsome. [Looks at MRS. ARBUTHNOT.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Caroline, shall we all make a move to the music-room? Miss Worsley is going to play. You'll come too, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot, won't you? You don't know what a treat is in store for you. [To DOCTOR DAUBENY.] I must really take Miss Worsley down some afternoon to the rectory. I should so much like dear Mrs. Daubeny to hear her on the violin. Ah, I forgot. Dear Mrs. Daubeny's hearing is a little defective, is it not?

THE ARCHDEACON. Her deafness is a great privation to her. She can't even hear my sermons now. She reads them at home. But she has many resources in herself, many resources.

LADY HUNSTANTON. She reads a good deal, I suppose?

THE ARCHDEACON. Just the very largest print. The eyesight is rapidly going. But she's never morbid, never morbid.

GERALD. [To LORD ILLINGWORTH.] Do speak to my mother, Lord Illingworth, before you go into the music-room. She seems to think, somehow, you don't mean what you said to me.

MRS. ALLONBY. Aren't you coming?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. In a few moments. Lady Hunstanton, if Mrs. Arbuthnot would allow me, I would like to say a few words to her, and we will join you later on.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, of course. You will have a great deal to say to her, and she will have a great deal to thank you for. It is not every son who gets such an offer, Mrs. Arbuthnot. But I know you appreciate that, dear.

LADY CAROLINE. John!

LADY HUNSTANTON. Now, don't keep Mrs. Arbuthnot too long, Lord Illingworth. We can't spare her.

[Exit following the other guests. Sound of violin heard from music-room.]

LORD ILLINGWORTH. So that is our son, Rachel! Well, I am very proud of him. He in a Harford, every inch of him. By the way, why Arbuthnot, Rachel?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. One name is as good as another, when one has no right to any name.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I suppose so - but why Gerald?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. After a man whose heart I broke - after my father.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Well, Rachel, what in over is over. All I have got to say now in that I am very, very much pleased with our boy. The world will know him merely as my private secretary, but to me he will be something very near, and very dear. It is a curious thing, Rachel; my life seemed to be quite complete. It was not so. It lacked something, it lacked a son. I have found my son now, I am glad I have found him.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. You have no right to claim him, or the smallest part of him. The boy is entirely mine, and shall remain mine.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. My dear Rachel, you have had him to yourself for over twenty years. Why not let me have him for a little now? He is quite as much mine as yours.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Are you talking of the child you abandoned? Of the child who, as far as you are concerned, might have died of hunger and of want?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You forget, Rachel, it was you who left me. It

was not I who left you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I left you because you refused to give the child a name. Before my son was born, I implored you to marry me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I had no expectations then. And besides, Rachel, I wasn't much older than you were. I was only twenty-two. I was twenty-one, I believe, when the whole thing began in your father's garden.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. When a man is old enough to do wrong he should be old enough to do right also.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. My dear Rachel, intellectual generalities are always interesting, but generalities in morals mean absolutely nothing. As for saying I left our child to starve, that, of course, is untrue and silly. My mother offered you six hundred a year. But you wouldn't take anything. You simply disappeared, and carried the child away with you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I wouldn't have accepted a penny from her. Your father was different. He told you, in my presence, when we were in Paris, that it was your duty to marry me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Oh, duty is what one expects from others, it is not what one does oneself. Of course, I was influenced by my mother. Every man is when he is young.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I am glad to hear you say so. Gerald shall certainly not go away with you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What nonsense, Rachel!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Do you think I would allow my son -

LORD ILLINGWORTH. OUR son.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. My son [LORD ILLINGWORTH shrugs his shoulders] - to go away with the man who spoiled my youth, who ruined my life, who has tainted every moment of my days? You don't realise what my past has been in suffering and in shame.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. My dear Rachel, I must candidly say that I think Gerald's future considerably more important than your past.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Gerald cannot separate his future from my past.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. That is exactly what he should do. That is exactly what you should help him to do. What a typical woman you are! You talk sentimentally, and you are thoroughly selfish the

whole time. But don't let us have a scene. Rachel, I want you to look at this matter from the common-sense point of view, from the point of view of what is best for our son, leaving you and me out of the question. What is our son at present? An underpaid clerk in a small Provincial Bank in a third-rate English town. If you imagine he is quite happy in such a position, you are mistaken. He is thoroughly discontented.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He was not discontented till he met you. You have made him so.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Of course, I made him so. Discontent is the first step in the progress of a man or a nation. But I did not leave him with a mere longing for things he could not get. No, I made him a charming offer. He jumped at it, I need hardly say. Any young man would. And now, simply because it turns out that I am the boy's own father and he my own son, you propose practically to ruin his career. That is to say, if I were a perfect stranger, you would allow Gerald to go away with me, but as he is my own flesh and blood you won't. How utterly illogical you are!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I will not allow him to go.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. How can you prevent it? What excuse can you give to him for making him decline such an offer as mine? I won't tell him in what relations I stand to him, I need hardly say. But you daren't tell him. You know that. Look how you have brought him up.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I have brought him up to be a good man.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Quite so. And what is the result? You have educated him to be your judge if he ever finds you out. And a bitter, an unjust judge he will be to you. Don't be deceived, Rachel. Children begin by loving their parents. After a time they judge them. Rarely, if ever, do they forgive them.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. George, don't take my son away from me. I have had twenty years of sorrow, and I have only had one thing to love me, only one thing to love. You have had a life of joy, and pleasure, and success. You have been quite happy, you have never thought of us. There was no reason, according to your views of life, why you should have remembered us at all. Your meeting us was a mere accident, a horrible accident. Forget it. Don't come now, and rob me of . . . of all I have in the whole world. You are so rich in other things. Leave me the little vineyard of my life; leave me the walled-in garden and the well of water; the ewe-lamb God sent me, in pity or in wrath, oh! leave me that. George, don't take Gerald from me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Rachel, at the present moment you are not necessary to Gerald's career; I am. There is nothing more to be said on the subject.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I will not let him go.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Here is Gerald. He has a right to decide for himself.

[Enter GERALD.]

GERALD. Well, dear mother, I hope you have settled it all with Lord Illingworth?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I have not, Gerald.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Your mother seems not to like your coming with me, for some reason.

GERALD. Why, mother?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I thought you were quite happy here with me, Gerald. I didn't know you were so anxious to leave me.

GERALD. Mother, how can you talk like that? Of course I have been quite happy with you. But a man can't stay always with his mother. No chap does. I want to make myself a position, to do something. I thought you would have been proud to see me Lord Illingworth's secretary.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I do not think you would be suitable as a private secretary to Lord Illingworth. You have no qualifications.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I don't wish to seem to interfere for a moment, Mrs. Arbuthnot, but as far as your last objection is concerned, I surely am the best judge. And I can only tell you that your son has all the qualifications I had hoped for. He has more, in fact, than I had even thought of. Far more. [MRS. ARBUTHNOT remains silent.] Have you any other reason, Mrs. Arbuthnot, why you don't wish your son to accept this post?

GERALD. Have you, mother? Do answer.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. If you have, Mrs. Arbuthnot, pray, pray say it. We are quite by ourselves here. Whatever it is, I need not say I will not repeat it.

GERALD. Mother?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. If you would like to be alone with your son, I

will leave you. You may have some other reason you don't wish me to hear.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I have no other reason.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Then, my dear boy, we may look on the thing as settled. Come, you and I will smoke a cigarette on the terrace together. And Mrs. Arbuthnot, pray let me tell you, that I think you have acted very, very wisely.

[Exit with GERALD. MRS. ARBUTHNOT is left alone. She stands immobile with a look of unutterable sorrow on her face.]

ACT DROP

THIRD ACT

SCENE

The Picture Gallery at Hunstanton. Door at back leading on to terrace.

[LORD ILLINGWORTH and GERALD, R.C. LORD ILLINGWORTH lolling on a sofa. GERALD in a chair.]

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Thoroughly sensible woman, your mother, Gerald. I knew she would come round in the end.

GERALD. My mother is awfully conscientious, Lord Illingworth, and I know she doesn't think I am educated enough to be your secretary. She is perfectly right, too. I was fearfully idle when I was at school, and I couldn't pass an examination now to save my life.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. My dear Gerald, examinations are of no value whatsoever. If a man is a gentleman, he knows quite enough, and if he is not a gentleman, whatever he knows is bad for him.

GERALD. But I am so ignorant of the world, Lord Illingworth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Don't be afraid, Gerald. Remember that you've got on your side the most wonderful thing in the world - youth! There is nothing like youth. The middle-aged are mortgaged to Life. The old are in life's lumber-room. But youth is the Lord of Life. Youth has a kingdom waiting for it. Every one is born a king, and most people die in exile, like most kings. To win back

my youth, Gerald, there is nothing I wouldn't do - except take exercise, get up early, or be a useful member of the community.

GERALD. But you don't call yourself old, Lord Illingworth?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I am old enough to be your father, Gerald.

GERALD. I don't remember my father; he died years ago.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. So Lady Hunstanton told me.

GERALD. It is very curious, my mother never talks to me about my father. I sometimes think she must have married beneath her.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. [Winces slightly.] Really? [Goes over and puts his hand on GERALD'S shoulder.] You have missed not having a father, I suppose, Gerald?

GERALD. Oh, no; my mother has been so good to me. No one ever had such a mother as I have had.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I am quite sure of that. Still I should imagine that most mothers don't quite understand their sons. Don't realise, I mean, that a son has ambitions, a desire to see life, to make himself a name. After all, Gerald, you couldn't be expected to pass all your life in such a hole as Wrockley, could you?

GERALD. Oh, no! It would be dreadful!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. A mother's love is very touching, of course, but it is often curiously selfish. I mean, there is a good deal of selfishness in it.

GERALD. [Slowly.] I suppose there is.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Your mother is a thoroughly good woman. But good women have such limited views of life, their horizon is so small, their interests are so petty, aren't they?

GERALD. They are awfully interested, certainly, in things we don't care much about.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I suppose your mother is very religious, and that sort of thing.

GERALD. Oh, yes, she's always going to church.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Ah! she is not modern, and to be modern is the only thing worth being nowadays. You want to be modern, don't you, Gerald? You want to know life as it really is. Not to be put off

with any old-fashioned theories about life. Well, what you have to do at present is simply to fit yourself for the best society. A man who can dominate a London dinner-table can dominate the world. The future belongs to the dandy. It is the exquisites who are going to rule.

GERALD. I should like to wear nice things awfully, but I have always been told that a man should not think too much about his clothes.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. People nowadays are so absolutely superficial that they don't understand the philosophy of the superficial. By the way, Gerald, you should learn how to tie your tie better. Sentiment is all very well for the button-hole. But the essential thing for a necktie is style. A well-tied tie is the first serious step in life.

GERALD. [Laughing.] I might be able to learn how to tie a tie, Lord Illingworth, but I should never be able to talk as you do. I don't know how to talk.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Oh! talk to every woman as if you loved her, and to every man as if he bored you, and at the end of your first season you will have the reputation of possessing the most perfect social tact.

GERALD. But it is very difficult to get into society isn't it?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. To get into the best society, nowadays, one has either to feed people, amuse people, or shock people - that is all!

GERALD. I suppose society is wonderfully delightful!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. To be in it is merely a bore. But to be out of it simply a tragedy. Society is a necessary thing. No man has any real success in this world unless he has got women to back him, and women rule society. If you have not got women on your side you are quite over. You might just as well be a barrister, or a stockbroker, or a journalist at once.

GERALD. It is very difficult to understand women, is it not?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You should never try to understand them. Women are pictures. Men are problems. If you want to know what a woman really means - which, by the way, is always a dangerous thing to do - look at her, don't listen to her.

GERALD. But women are awfully clever, aren't they?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. One should always tell them so. But, to the

philosopher, my dear Gerald, women represent the triumph of matter over mind - just as men represent the triumph of mind over morals.

GERALD. How then can women have so much power as you say they have?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. The history of women is the history of the worst form of tyranny the world has ever known. The tyranny of the weak over the strong. It is the only tyranny that lasts.

GERALD. But haven't women got a refining influence?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Nothing refines but the intellect.

GERALD. Still, there are many different kinds of women, aren't there?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Only two kinds in society: the plain and the coloured.

GERALD. But there are good women in society, aren't there?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Far too many.

GERALD. But do you think women shouldn't be good?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. One should never tell them so, they'd all become good at once. Women are a fascinatingly wilful sex. Every woman is a rebel, and usually in wild revolt against herself.

GERALD. You have never been married, Lord Illingworth, have you?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Men marry because they are tired; women because they are curious. Both are disappointed.

GERALD. But don't you think one can be happy when one is married?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Perfectly happy. But the happiness of a married man, my dear Gerald, depends on the people he has not married.

GERALD. But if one is in love?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. One should always be in love. That is the reason one should never marry.

GERALD. Love is a very wonderful thing, isn't it?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. When one is in love one begins by deceiving oneself. And one ends by deceiving others. That is what the world calls a romance. But a really GRANDE PASSION is comparatively rare

nowadays. It is the privilege of people who have nothing to do. That is the one use of the idle classes in a country, and the only possible explanation of us Harfords.

GERALD. Harfords, Lord Illingworth?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. That is my family name. You should study the Peerage, Gerald. It is the one book a young man about town should know thoroughly, and it is the best thing in fiction the English have ever done. And now, Gerald, you are going into a perfectly new life with me, and I want you to know how to live. [MRS. ARBUTHNOT appears on terrace behind.] For the world has been made by fools that wise men should live in it!

[Enter L.C. LADY HUNSTANTON and DR. DAUBENY.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! here you are, dear Lord Illingworth. Well, I suppose you have been telling our young friend, Gerald, what his new duties are to be, and giving him a great deal of good advice over a pleasant cigarette.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I have been giving him the best of advice, Lady Hunstanton, and the best of cigarettes.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I am so sorry I was not here to listen to you, but I suppose I am too old now to learn. Except from you, dear Archdeacon, when you are in your nice pulpit. But then I always know what you are going to say, so I don't feel alarmed. [Sees MRS. ARBUTHNOT.] Ah! dear Mrs. Arbuthnot, do come and join us. Come, dear. [Enter MRS. ARBUTHNOT.] Gerald has been having such a long talk with Lord Illingworth; I am sure you must feel very much flattered at the pleasant way in which everything has turned out for him. Let us sit down. [They sit down.] And how is your beautiful embroidery going on?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I am always at work, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Mrs. Daubeney embroiders a little, too, doesn't she?

THE ARCHDEACON. She was very deft with her needle once, quite a Dorcas. But the gout has crippled her fingers a good deal. She has not touched the tambour frame for nine or ten years. But she has many other amusements. She is very much interested in her own health.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! that is always a nice distraction, in it not? Now, what are you talking about, Lord Illingworth? Do tell us.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I was on the point of explaining to Gerald that

the world has always laughed at its own tragedies, that being the only way in which it has been able to bear them. And that, consequently, whatever the world has treated seriously belongs to the comedy side of things.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Now I am quite out of my depth. I usually am when Lord Illingworth says anything. And the Humane Society is most careless. They never rescue me. I am left to sink. I have a dim idea, dear Lord Illingworth, that you are always on the side of the sinners, and I know I always try to be on the side of the saints, but that is as far as I get. And after all, it may be merely the fancy of a drowning person.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. The only difference between the saint and the sinner is that every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! that quite does for me. I haven't a word to say. You and I, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot, are behind the age. We can't follow Lord Illingworth. Too much care was taken with our education, I am afraid. To have been well brought up is a great drawback nowadays. It shuts one out from so much.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I should be sorry to follow Lord Illingworth in any of his opinions.

LADY HUNSTANTON. You are quite right, dear.

[GERALD shrugs his shoulders and looks irritably over at his mother. Enter LADY CAROLINE.]

LADY CAROLINE. Jane, have you seen John anywhere?

LADY HUNSTANTON. You needn't be anxious about him, dear. He is with Lady Stutfield; I saw them some time ago, in the Yellow Drawing-room. They seem quite happy together. You are not going, Caroline? Pray sit down.

LADY CAROLINE. I think I had better look after John.

[Exit LADY CAROLINE.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. It doesn't do to pay men so much attention. And Caroline has really nothing to be anxious about. Lady Stutfield is very sympathetic. She is just as sympathetic about one thing as she is about another. A beautiful nature.

[Enter SIR JOHN and MRS. ALLONBY.]

Ah! here is Sir John! And with Mrs. Allonby too! I suppose it was

Mrs. Allonby I saw him with. Sir John, Caroline has been looking everywhere for you.

MRS. ALLONBY. We have been waiting for her in the Music-room, dear Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! the Music-room, of course. I thought it was the Yellow Drawing-room, my memory is getting so defective. [To the ARCHDEACON.] Mrs. Daubeney has a wonderful memory, hasn't she?

THE ARCHDEACON. She used to be quite remarkable for her memory, but since her last attack she recalls chiefly the events of her early childhood. But she finds great pleasure in such retrospections, great pleasure.

[Enter LADY STUTFIELD and MR. KELVIL.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! dear Lady Stutfield! and what has Mr. Kelvil been talking to you about?

LADY STUTFIELD. About Bimetallism, as well as I remember.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Bimetallism! Is that quite a nice subject? However, I know people discuss everything very freely nowadays. What did Sir John talk to you about, dear Mrs. Allonby?

MRS. ALLONBY. About Patagonia.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Really? What a remote topic! But very improving, I have no doubt.

MRS. ALLONBY. He has been most interesting on the subject of Patagonia. Savages seem to have quite the same views as cultured people on almost all subjects. They are excessively advanced.

LADY HUNSTANTON. What do they do?

MRS. ALLONBY. Apparently everything.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Well, it is very gratifying, dear Archdeacon, is it not, to find that Human Nature is permanently one. - On the whole, the world is the same world, is it not?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. The world is simply divided into two classes - those who believe the incredible, like the public - and those who do the improbable -

MRS. ALLONBY. Like yourself?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Yes; I am always astonishing myself. It is the

only thing that makes life worth living.

LADY STUTFIELD. And what have you been doing lately that astonishes you?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I have been discovering all kinds of beautiful qualities in my own nature.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah! don't become quite perfect all at once. Do it gradually!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I don't intend to grow perfect at all. At least, I hope I shan't. It would be most inconvenient. Women love us for our defects. If we have enough of them, they will forgive us everything, even our gigantic intellects.

MRS. ALLONBY. It is premature to ask us to forgive analysis. We forgive adoration; that is quite as much as should be expected from us.

[Enter LORD ALFRED. He joins LADY STUTFIELD.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! we women should forgive everything, shouldn't we, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot? I am sure you agree with me in that.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I do not, Lady Hunstanton. I think there are many things women should never forgive.

LADY HUNSTANTON. What sort of things?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. The ruin of another woman's life.

[Moves slowly away to back of stage.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! those things are very sad, no doubt, but I believe there are admirable homes where people of that kind are looked after and reformed, and I think on the whole that the secret of life is to take things very, very easily.

MRS. ALLONBY. The secret of life is never to have an emotion that is unbecoming.

LADY STUTFIELD. The secret of life is to appreciate the pleasure of being terribly, terribly deceived.

KELVIL. The secret of life is to resist temptation, Lady Stutfield.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. There is no secret of life. Life's aim, if it has one, is simply to be always looking for temptations. There are

not nearly enough. I sometimes pass a whole day without coming across a single one. It is quite dreadful. It makes one so nervous about the future.

LADY HUNSTANTON. [Shakes her fan at him.] I don't know how it is, dear Lord Illingworth, but everything you have said to-day seems to me excessively immoral. It has been most interesting, listening to you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. All thought is immoral. Its very essence is destruction. If you think of anything, you kill it. Nothing survives being thought of.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I don't understand a word, Lord Illingworth. But I have no doubt it is all quite true. Personally, I have very little to reproach myself with, on the score of thinking. I don't believe in women thinking too much. Women should think in moderation, as they should do all things in moderation.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Moderation is a fatal thing, Lady Hunstanton. Nothing succeeds like excess.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I hope I shall remember that. It sounds an admirable maxim. But I'm beginning to forget everything. It's a great misfortune.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is one of your most fascinating qualities, Lady Hunstanton. No woman should have a memory. Memory in a woman is the beginning of dowdiness. One can always tell from a woman's bonnet whether she has got a memory or not.

LADY HUNSTANTON. How charming you are, dear Lord Illingworth. You always find out that one's most glaring fault is one's most important virtue. You have the most comforting views of life.

[Enter FARQUHAR.]

FARQUHAR. Doctor Daubeny's carriage!

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear Archdeacon! It is only half-past ten.

THE ARCHDEACON. [Rising.] I am afraid I must go, Lady Hunstanton. Tuesday is always one of Mrs. Daubeny's bad nights.

LADY HUNSTANTON. [Rising.] Well, I won't keep you from her. [Goes with him towards door.] I have told Farquhar to put a brace of partridge into the carriage. Mrs. Daubeny may fancy them.

THE ARCHDEACON. It is very kind of you, but Mrs. Daubeny never touches solids now. Lives entirely on jellies. But she is

wonderfully cheerful, wonderfully cheerful. She has nothing to complain of.

[Exit with LADY HUNSTANTON.]

MRS. ALLONBY. [Goes over to LORD ILLINGWORTH.] There is a beautiful moon to-night.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Let us go and look at it. To look at anything that is inconstant is charming nowadays.

MRS. ALLONBY. You have your looking-glass.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is unkind. It merely shows me my wrinkles.

MRS. ALLONBY. Mine is better behaved. It never tells me the truth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Then it is in love with you.

[Exeunt SIR JOHN, LADY STUTFIELD, MR. KELVIL and LORD ALFRED.]

GERALD. [To LORD ILLINGWORTH] May I come too?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Do, my dear boy. [Moves towards with MRS. ALLONBY and GERALD.]

[LADY CAROLINE enters, looks rapidly round and goes off in opposite direction to that taken by SIR JOHN and LADY STUTFIELD.]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Gerald!

GERALD. What, mother!

[Exit LORD ILLINGWORTH with MRS. ALLONBY.]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It is getting late. Let us go home.

GERALD. My dear mother. Do let us wait a little longer. Lord Illingworth is so delightful, and, by the way, mother, I have a great surprise for you. We are starting for India at the end of this month.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Let us go home.

GERALD. If you really want to, of course, mother, but I must bid good-bye to Lord Illingworth first. I'll be back in five minutes.
[Exit.]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Let him leave me if he chooses, but not with him -

not with him! I couldn't bear it. [Walks up and down.]

[Enter HESTER.]

HESTER. What a lovely night it is, Mrs. Arbuthnot.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Is it?

HESTER. Mrs. Arbuthnot, I wish you would let us be friends. You are so different from the other women here. When you came into the Drawing-room this evening, somehow you brought with you a sense of what is good and pure in life. I had been foolish. There are things that are right to say, but that may be said at the wrong time and to the wrong people.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I heard what you said. I agree with it, Miss Worsley.

HESTER. I didn't know you had heard it. But I knew you would agree with me. A woman who has sinned should be punished, shouldn't she?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Yes.

HESTER. She shouldn't be allowed to come into the society of good men and women?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. She should not.

HESTER. And the man should be punished in the same way?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. In the same way. And the children, if there are children, in the same way also?

HESTER. Yes, it is right that the sins of the parents should be visited on the children. It is a just law. It is God's law.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It is one of God's terrible laws.

[Moves away to fireplace.]

HESTER. You are distressed about your son leaving you, Mrs. Arbuthnot?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Yes.

HESTER. Do you like him going away with Lord Illingworth? Of course there is position, no doubt, and money, but position and money are not everything, are they?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. They are nothing; they bring misery.

HESTER. Then why do you let your son go with him?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He wishes it himself.

HESTER. But if you asked him he would stay, would he not?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He has set his heart on going.

HESTER. He couldn't refuse you anything. He loves you too much. Ask him to stay. Let me send him in to you. He is on the terrace at this moment with Lord Illingworth. I heard them laughing together as I passed through the Music-room.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Don't trouble, Miss Worsley, I can wait. It is of no consequence.

HESTER. No, I'll tell him you want him. Do - do ask him to stay.
[Exit HESTER.]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He won't come - I know he won't come.

[Enter LADY CAROLINE. She looks round anxiously. Enter GERALD.]

LADY CAROLINE. Mr. Arbuthnot, may I ask you is Sir John anywhere on the terrace?

GERALD. No, Lady Caroline, he is not on the terrace.

LADY CAROLINE. It is very curious. It is time for him to retire.

[Exit LADY CAROLINE.]

GERALD. Dear mother, I am afraid I kept you waiting. I forgot all about it. I am so happy to-night, mother; I have never been so happy.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. At the prospect of going away?

GERALD. Don't put it like that, mother. Of course I am sorry to leave you. Why, you are the best mother in the whole world. But after all, as Lord Illingworth says, it is impossible to live in such a place as Wrockley. You don't mind it. But I'm ambitious; I want something more than that. I want to have a career. I want to do something that will make you proud of me, and Lord Illingworth is going to help me. He is going to do everything for me.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Gerald, don't go away with Lord Illingworth. I implore you not to. Gerald, I beg you!

GERALD. Mother, how changeable you are! You don't seem to know your own mind for a single moment. An hour and a half ago in the Drawing-room you agreed to the whole thing; now you turn round and make objections, and try to force me to give up my one chance in life. Yes, my one chance. You don't suppose that men like Lord Illingworth are to be found every day, do you, mother? It is very strange that when I have had such a wonderful piece of good luck, the one person to put difficulties in my way should be my own mother. Besides, you know, mother, I love Hester Worsley. Who could help loving her? I love her more than I have ever told you, far more. And if I had a position, if I had prospects, I could - I could ask her to - Don't you understand now, mother, what it means to me to be Lord Illingworth's secretary? To start like that is to find a career ready for one - before one - waiting for one. If I were Lord Illingworth's secretary I could ask Hester to be my wife. As a wretched bank clerk with a hundred a year it would be an impertinence.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I fear you need have no hopes of Miss Worsley. I know her views on life. She has just told them to me. [A pause.]

GERALD. Then I have my ambition left, at any rate. That is something - I am glad I have that! You have always tried to crush my ambition, mother - haven't you? You have told me that the world is a wicked place, that success is not worth having, that society is shallow, and all that sort of thing - well, I don't believe it, mother. I think the world must be delightful. I think society must be exquisite. I think success is a thing worth having. You have been wrong in all that you taught me, mother, quite wrong. Lord Illingworth is a successful man. He is a fashionable man. He is a man who lives in the world and for it. Well, I would give anything to be just like Lord Illingworth.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I would sooner see you dead.

GERALD. Mother, what is your objection to Lord Illingworth? Tell me - tell me right out. What is it?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He is a bad man.

GERALD. In what way bad? I don't understand what you mean.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I will tell you.

GERALD. I suppose you think him bad, because he doesn't believe the same things as you do. Well, men are different from women, mother. It is natural that they should have different views.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It is not what Lord Illingworth believes, or what

he does not believe, that makes him bad. It is what he is.

GERALD. Mother, is it something you know of him? Something you actually know?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It is something I know.

GERALD. Something you are quite sure of?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Quite sure of.

GERALD. How long have you known it?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. For twenty years.

GERALD. Is it fair to go back twenty years in any man's career? And what have you or I to do with Lord Illingworth's early life? What business is it of ours?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. What this man has been, he is now, and will be always.

GERALD. Mother, tell me what Lord Illingworth did? If he did anything shameful, I will not go away with him. Surely you know me well enough for that?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Gerald, come near to me. Quite close to me, as you used to do when you were a little boy, when you were mother's own boy. [GERALD sits down beside his mother. She runs her fingers through his hair, and strokes his hands.] Gerald, there was a girl once, she was very young, she was little over eighteen at the time. George Harford - that was Lord Illingworth's name then - George Harford met her. She knew nothing about life. He - knew everything. He made this girl love him. He made her love him so much that she left her father's house with him one morning. She loved him so much, and he had promised to marry her! He had solemnly promised to marry her, and she had believed him. She was very young, and - and ignorant of what life really is. But he put the marriage off from week to week, and month to month. - She trusted in him all the while. She loved him. - Before her child was born - for she had a child - she implored him for the child's sake to marry her, that the child might have a name, that her sin might not be visited on the child, who was innocent. He refused. After the child was born she left him, taking the child away, and her life was ruined, and her soul ruined, and all that was sweet, and good, and pure in her ruined also. She suffered terribly - she suffers now. She will always suffer. For her there is no joy, no peace, no atonement. She is a woman who drags a chain like a guilty thing. She is a woman who wears a mask, like a thing that is a leper. The fire cannot purify her. The waters cannot quench

her anguish. Nothing can heal her! no anodyne can give her sleep! no poppies forgetfulness! She is lost! She is a lost soul! - That is why I call Lord Illingworth a bad man. That is why I don't want my boy to be with him.

GERALD. My dear mother, it all sounds very tragic, of course. But I dare say the girl was just as much to blame as Lord Illingworth was. - After all, would a really nice girl, a girl with any nice feelings at all, go away from her home with a man to whom she was not married, and live with him as his wife? No nice girl would.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. [After a pause.] Gerald, I withdraw all my objections. You are at liberty to go away with Lord Illingworth, when and where you choose.

GERALD. Dear mother, I knew you wouldn't stand in my way. You are the best woman God ever made. And, as for Lord Illingworth, I don't believe he is capable of anything infamous or base. I can't believe it of him - I can't.

HESTER. [Outside.] Let me go! Let me go! [Enter HESTER in terror, and rushes over to GERALD and flings herself in his arms.]

HESTER. Oh! save me - save me from him!

GERALD. From whom?

HESTER. He has insulted me! Horribly insulted me! Save me!

GERALD. Who? Who has dared - ?

[LORD ILLINGWORTH enters at back of stage. HESTER breaks from GERALD'S arms and points to him.]

GERALD [He is quite beside himself with rage and indignation.] Lord Illingworth, you have insulted the purest thing on God's earth, a thing as pure as my own mother. You have insulted the woman I love most in the world with my own mother. As there is a God in Heaven, I will kill you!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. [Rushing across and catching hold of him] No! no!

GERALD. [Thrusting her back.] Don't hold me, mother. Don't hold me - I'll kill him!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Gerald!

GERALD. Let me go, I say!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Stop, Gerald, stop! He is your own father!

[GERALD clutches his mother's hands and looks into her face. She sinks slowly on the ground in shame. HESTER steals towards the door. LORD ILLINGWORTH frowns and bites his lip. After a time GERALD raises his mother up, puts his arm round her, and leads her from the room.]

ACT DROP

FOURTH ACT

SCENE

Sitting-room at Mrs. Arbuthnot's. Large open French window at back, looking on to garden. Doors R.C. and L.C.

[GERALD ARBUTHNOT writing at table.]

[Enter ALICE R.C. followed by LADY HUNSTANTON and MRS. ALLONBY.]

ALICE. Lady Hunstanton and Mrs. Allonby.

[Exit L.C.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Good morning, Gerald.

GERALD. [Rising.] Good morning, Lady Hunstanton. Good morning, Mrs. Allonby.

LADY HUNSTANTON. [Sitting down.] We came to inquire for your dear mother, Gerald. I hope she is better?

GERALD. My mother has not come down yet, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, I am afraid the heat was too much for her last night. I think there must have been thunder in the air. Or perhaps it was the music. Music makes one feel so romantic - at least it always gets on one's nerves.

MRS. ALLONBY. It's the same thing, nowadays.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I am so glad I don't know what you mean, dear. I am afraid you mean something wrong. Ah, I see you're examining Mrs. Arbuthnot's pretty room. Isn't it nice and old-fashioned?

MRS. ALLONBY. [Surveying the room through her lorgnette.] It

looks quite the happy English home.

LADY HUNSTANTON. That's just the word, dear; that just describes it. One feels your mother's good influence in everything she has about her, Gerald.

MRS. ALLONBY. Lord Illingworth says that all influence is bad, but that a good influence is the worst in the world.

LADY HUNSTANTON. When Lord Illingworth knows Mrs. Arbuthnot better he will change his mind. I must certainly bring him here.

MRS. ALLONBY. I should like to see Lord Illingworth in a happy English home.

LADY HUNSTANTON. It would do him a great deal of good, dear. Most women in London, nowadays, seem to furnish their rooms with nothing but orchids, foreigners, and French novels. But here we have the room of a sweet saint. Fresh natural flowers, books that don't shock one, pictures that one can look at without blushing.

MRS. ALLONBY. But I like blushing.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Well, there IS a good deal to be said for blushing, if one can do it at the proper moment. Poor dear Hunstanton used to tell me I didn't blush nearly often enough. But then he was so very particular. He wouldn't let me know any of his men friends, except those who were over seventy, like poor Lord Ashton: who afterwards, by the way, was brought into the Divorce Court. A most unfortunate case.

MRS. ALLONBY. I delight in men over seventy. They always offer one the devotion of a lifetime. I think seventy an ideal age for a man.

LADY HUNSTANTON. She is quite incorrigible, Gerald, isn't she? By-the-by, Gerald, I hope your dear mother will come and see me more often now. You and Lord Illingworth start almost immediately, don't you?

GERALD. I have given up my intention of being Lord Illingworth's secretary.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Surely not, Gerald! It would be most unwise of you. What reason can you have?

GERALD. I don't think I should be suitable for the post.

MRS. ALLONBY. I wish Lord Illingworth would ask me to be his secretary. But he says I am not serious enough.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear, you really mustn't talk like that in this house. Mrs. Arbuthnot doesn't know anything about the wicked society in which we all live. She won't go into it. She is far too good. I consider it was a great honour her coming to me last night. It gave quite an atmosphere of respectability to the party.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, that must have been what you thought was thunder in the air.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear, how can you say that? There is no resemblance between the two things at all. But really, Gerald, what do you mean by not being suitable?

GERALD. Lord Illingworth's views of life and mine are too different.

LADY HUNSTANTON. But, my dear Gerald, at your age you shouldn't have any views of life. They are quite out of place. You must be guided by others in this matter. Lord Illingworth has made you the most flattering offer, and travelling with him you would see the world - as much of it, at least, as one should look at - under the best auspices possible, and stay with all the right people, which is so important at this solemn moment in your career.

GERALD. I don't want to see the world: I've seen enough of it.

MRS. ALLONBY. I hope you don't think you have exhausted life, Mr. Arbuthnot. When a man says that, one knows that life has exhausted him.

GERALD. I don't wish to leave my mother.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Now, Gerald, that is pure laziness on your part. Not leave your mother! If I were your mother I would insist on your going.

[Enter ALICE L.C.]

ALICE. Mrs. Arbuthnot's compliments, my lady, but she has a bad headache, and cannot see any one this morning. [Exit R.C.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. [Rising.] A bad headache! I am so sorry! Perhaps you'll bring her up to Hunstanton this afternoon, if she is better, Gerald.

GERALD. I am afraid not this afternoon, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Well, to-morrow, then. Ah, if you had a father, Gerald, he wouldn't let you waste your life here. He would send

you off with Lord Illingworth at once. But mothers are so weak. They give up to their sons in everything. We are all heart, all heart. Come, dear, I must call at the rectory and inquire for Mrs. Daubeney, who, I am afraid, is far from well. It is wonderful how the Archdeacon bears up, quite wonderful. He is the most sympathetic of husbands. Quite a model. Good-bye, Gerald, give my fondest love to your mother.

MRS. ALLONBY. Good-bye, Mr. Arbuthnot.

GERALD. Good-bye.

[Exit LADY HUNSTANTON and MRS. ALLONBY. GERALD sits down and reads over his letter.]

GERALD. What name can I sign? I, who have no right to any name. [Signs name, puts letter into envelope, addresses it, and is about to seal it, when door L.C. opens and MRS. ARBUTHNOT enters. GERALD lays down sealing-wax. Mother and son look at each other.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. [Through French window at the back.] Good-bye again, Gerald. We are taking the short cut across your pretty garden. Now, remember my advice to you - start at once with Lord Illingworth.

MRS. ALLONBY. AU REVOIR, Mr. Arbuthnot. Mind you bring me back something nice from your travels - not an Indian shawl - on no account an Indian shawl.

[Exeunt.]

GERALD. Mother, I have just written to him.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. To whom?

GERALD. To my father. I have written to tell him to come here at four o'clock this afternoon.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He shall not come here. He shall not cross the threshold of my house.

GERALD. He must come.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Gerald, if you are going away with Lord Illingworth, go at once. Go before it kills me: but don't ask me to meet him.

GERALD. Mother, you don't understand. Nothing in the world would induce me to go away with Lord Illingworth, or to leave you. Surely you know me well enough for that. No: I have written to him

to say -

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. What can you have to say to him?

GERALD. Can't you guess, mother, what I have written in this letter?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. No.

GERALD. Mother, surely you can. Think, think what must be done, now, at once, within the next few days.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. There is nothing to be done.

GERALD. I have written to Lord Illingworth to tell him that he must marry you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Marry me?

GERALD. Mother, I will force him to do it. The wrong that has been done you must be repaired. Atonement must be made. Justice may be slow, mother, but it comes in the end. In a few days you shall be Lord Illingworth's lawful wife.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. But, Gerald -

GERALD. I will insist upon his doing it. I will make him do it: he will not dare to refuse.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. But, Gerald, it is I who refuse. I will not marry Lord Illingworth.

GERALD. Not marry him? Mother!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I will not marry him.

GERALD. But you don't understand: it is for your sake I am talking, not for mine. This marriage, this necessary marriage, this marriage which for obvious reasons must inevitably take place, will not help me, will not give me a name that will be really, rightly mine to bear. But surely it will be something for you, that you, my mother, should, however late, become the wife of the man who is my father. Will not that be something?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I will not marry him.

GERALD. Mother, you must.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I will not. You talk of atonement for a wrong done. What atonement can be made to me? There is no atonement

possible. I am disgraced: he is not. That is all. It is the usual history of a man and a woman as it usually happens, as it always happens. And the ending is the ordinary ending. The woman suffers. The man goes free.

GERALD. I don't know if that is the ordinary ending, mother: I hope it is not. But your life, at any rate, shall not end like that. The man shall make whatever reparation is possible. It is not enough. It does not wipe out the past, I know that. But at least it makes the future better, better for you, mother.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I refuse to marry Lord Illingworth.

GERALD. If he came to you himself and asked you to be his wife you would give him a different answer. Remember, he is my father.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. If he came himself, which he will not do, my answer would be the same. Remember I am your mother.

GERALD. Mother, you make it terribly difficult for me by talking like that; and I can't understand why you won't look at this matter from the right, from the only proper standpoint. It is to take away the bitterness out of your life, to take away the shadow that lies on your name, that this marriage must take place. There is no alternative: and after the marriage you and I can go away together. But the marriage must take place first. It is a duty that you owe, not merely to yourself, but to all other women - yes: to all the other women in the world, lest he betray more.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I owe nothing to other women. There is not one of them to help me. There is not one woman in the world to whom I could go for pity, if I would take it, or for sympathy, if I could win it. Women are hard on each other. That girl, last night, good though she is, fled from the room as though I were a tainted thing. She was right. I am a tainted thing. But my wrongs are my own, and I will bear them alone. I must bear them alone. What have women who have not sinned to do with me, or I with them? We do not understand each other.

[Enter HESTER behind.]

GERALD. I implore you to do what I ask you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. What son has ever asked of his mother to make so hideous a sacrifice? None.

GERALD. What mother has ever refused to marry the father of her own child? None.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Let me be the first, then. I will not do it.

GERALD. Mother, you believe in religion, and you brought me up to believe in it also. Well, surely your religion, the religion that you taught me when I was a boy, mother, must tell you that I am right. You know it, you feel it.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I do not know it. I do not feel it, nor will I ever stand before God's altar and ask God's blessing on so hideous a mockery as a marriage between me and George Harford. I will not say the words the Church bids us to say. I will not say them. I dare not. How could I swear to love the man I loathe, to honour him who wrought you dishonour, to obey him who, in his mastery, made me to sin? No: marriage is a sacrament for those who love each other. It is not for such as him, or such as me. Gerald, to save you from the world's sneers and taunts I have lied to the world. For twenty years I have lied to the world. I could not tell the world the truth. Who can, ever? But not for my own sake will I lie to God, and in God's presence. No, Gerald, no ceremony, Church-hallowed or State-made, shall ever bind me to George Harford. It may be that I am too bound to him already, who, robbing me, yet left me richer, so that in the mire of my life I found the pearl of price, or what I thought would be so.

GERALD. I don't understand you now.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Men don't understand what mothers are. I am no different from other women except in the wrong done me and the wrong I did, and my very heavy punishments and great disgrace. And yet, to bear you I had to look on death. To nurture you I had to wrestle with it. Death fought with me for you. All women have to fight with death to keep their children. Death, being childless, wants our children from us. Gerald, when you were naked I clothed you, when you were hungry I gave you food. Night and day all that long winter I tended you. No office is too mean, no care too lowly for the thing we women love - and oh! how I loved YOU. Not Hannah, Samuel more. And you needed love, for you were weakly, and only love could have kept you alive. Only love can keep any one alive. And boys are careless often and without thinking give pain, and we always fancy that when they come to man's estate and know us better they will repay us. But it is not so. The world draws them from our side, and they make friends with whom they are happier than they are with us, and have amusements from which we are barred, and interests that are not ours: and they are unjust to us often, for when they find life bitter they blame us for it, and when they find it sweet we do not taste its sweetness with them . . . You made many friends and went into their houses and were glad with them, and I, knowing my secret, did not dare to follow, but stayed at home and closed the door, shut out the sun and sat in darkness. What should I have done in honest households? My past was ever with me. . . . And you thought I didn't care for the pleasant

things of life. I tell you I longed for them, but did not dare to touch them, feeling I had no right. You thought I was happier working amongst the poor. That was my mission, you imagined. It was not, but where else was I to go? The sick do not ask if the hand that smooths their pillow is pure, nor the dying care if the lips that touch their brow have known the kiss of sin. It was you I thought of all the time; I gave to them the love you did not need: lavished on them a love that was not theirs . . . And you thought I spent too much of my time in going to Church, and in Church duties. But where else could I turn? God's house is the only house where sinners are made welcome, and you were always in my heart, Gerald, too much in my heart. For, though day after day, at morn or evensong, I have knelt in God's house, I have never repented of my sin. How could I repent of my sin when you, my love, were its fruit! Even now that you are bitter to me I cannot repent. I do not. You are more to me than innocence. I would rather be your mother - oh! much rather! - than have been always pure . . . Oh, don't you see? don't you understand? It is my dishonour that has made you so dear to me. It is my disgrace that has bound you so closely to me. It is the price I paid for you - the price of soul and body - that makes me love you as I do. Oh, don't ask me to do this horrible thing. Child of my shame, be still the child of my shame!

GERALD. Mother, I didn't know you loved me so much as that. And I will be a better son to you than I have been. And you and I must never leave each other . . . but, mother . . . I can't help it . . . you must become my father's wife. You must marry him. It is your duty.

HESTER. [Running forwards and embracing MRS. ARBUTHNOT.] No, no; you shall not. That would be real dishonour, the first you have ever known. That would be real disgrace: the first to touch you. Leave him and come with me. There are other countries than England . . . Oh! other countries over sea, better, wiser, and less unjust lands. The world is very wide and very big.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. No, not for me. For me the world is shrivelled to a palm's breadth, and where I walk there are thorns.

HESTER. It shall not be so. We shall somewhere find green valleys and fresh waters, and if we weep, well, we shall weep together. Have we not both loved him?

GERALD. Hester!

HESTER. [Waving him back.] Don't, don't! You cannot love me at all, unless you love her also. You cannot honour me, unless she's holier to you. In her all womanhood is martyred. Not she alone, but all of us are stricken in her house.

GERALD. Hester, Hester, what shall I do?

HESTER. Do you respect the man who is your father?

GERALD. Respect him? I despise him! He is infamous.

HESTER. I thank you for saving me from him last night.

GERALD. Ah, that is nothing. I would die to save you. But you don't tell me what to do now!

HESTER. Have I not thanked you for saving ME?

GERALD. But what should I do?

HESTER. Ask your own heart, not mine. I never had a mother to save, or shame.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He is hard - he is hard. Let me go away.

GERALD. [Rushes over and kneels down bedside his mother.] Mother, forgive me: I have been to blame.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Don't kiss my hands: they are cold. My heart is cold: something has broken it.

HESTER. Ah, don't say that. Hearts live by being wounded. Pleasure may turn a heart to stone, riches may make it callous, but sorrow - oh, sorrow cannot break it. Besides, what sorrows have you now? Why, at this moment you are more dear to him than ever, DEAR though you have BEEN, and oh! how dear you HAVE been always. Ah! be kind to him.

GERALD. You are my mother and my father all in one. I need no second parent. It was for you I spoke, for you alone. Oh, say something, mother. Have I but found one love to lose another? Don't tell me that. O mother, you are cruel. [Gets up and flings himself sobbing on a sofa.]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. [To HESTER.] But has he found indeed another love?

HESTER. You know I have loved him always.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. But we are very poor.

HESTER. Who, being loved, is poor? Oh, no one. I hate my riches. They are a burden. Let him share it with me.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. But we are disgraced. We rank among the outcasts Gerald is nameless. The sins of the parents should be visited on the children. It is God's law.

HESTER. I was wrong. God's law is only Love.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. [Rises, and taking HESTER by the hand, goes slowly over to where GERALD is lying on the sofa with his head buried in his hands. She touches him and he looks up.] Gerald, I cannot give you a father, but I have brought you a wife.

GERALD. Mother, I am not worthy either of her or you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. So she comes first, you are worthy. And when you are away, Gerald . . . with . . . her - oh, think of me sometimes. Don't forget me. And when you pray, pray for me. We should pray when we are happiest, and you will be happy, Gerald.

HESTER. Oh, you don't think of leaving us?

GERALD. Mother, you won't leave us?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I might bring shame upon you!

GERALD. Mother!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. For a little then: and if you let me, near you always.

HESTER. [To MRS. ARBUTHNOT.] Come out with us to the garden.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Later on, later on. [Exeunt HESTER and GERALD. MRS. ARBUTHNOT goes towards door L.C. Stops at looking-glass over mantelpiece and looks into it. Enter ALICE R.C.]

ALICE. A gentleman to see you, ma'am.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Say I am not at home. Show me the card. [Takes card from salver and looks at it.] Say I will not see him.

[LORD ILLINGWORTH enters. MRS. ARBUTHNOT sees him in the glass and starts, but does not turn round. Exit ALICE.] What can you have to say to me to-day, George Harford? You can have nothing to say to me. You must leave this house.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Rachel, Gerald knows everything about you and me now, so some arrangement must be come to that will suit us all three. I assure you, he will find in me the most charming and generous of fathers.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. My son may come in at any moment. I saved you last night. I may not be able to save you again. My son feels my dishonour strongly, terribly strongly. I beg you to go.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. [Sitting down.] Last night was excessively unfortunate. That silly Puritan girl making a scene merely because I wanted to kiss her. What harm is there in a kiss?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. [Turning round.] A kiss may ruin a human life, George Harford. I know that. I know that too well.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. We won't discuss that at present. What is of importance to-day, as yesterday, is still our son. I am extremely fond of him, as you know, and odd though it may seem to you, I admired his conduct last night immensely. He took up the cudgels for that pretty prude with wonderful promptitude. He is just what I should have liked a son of mine to be. Except that no son of mine should ever take the side of the Puritans: that is always an error. Now, what I propose is this.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Lord Illingworth, no proposition of yours interests me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. According to our ridiculous English laws, I can't legitimise Gerald. But I can leave him my property. Illingworth is entailed, of course, but it is a tedious barrack of a place. He can have Ashby, which is much prettier, Harborough, which has the best shooting in the north of England, and the house in St. James Square. What more can a gentleman require in this world?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Nothing more, I am quite sure.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. As for a title, a title is really rather a nuisance in these democratic days. As George Harford I had everything I wanted. Now I have merely everything that other people want, which isn't nearly so pleasant. Well, my proposal is this.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I told you I was not interested, and I beg you to go.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. The boy is to be with you for six months in the year, and with me for the other six. That is perfectly fair, is it not? You can have whatever allowance you like, and live where you choose. As for your past, no one knows anything about it except myself and Gerald. There is the Puritan, of course, the Puritan in white muslin, but she doesn't count. She couldn't tell the story without explaining that she objected to being kissed, could she? And all the women would think her a fool and the men think her a

bore. And you need not be afraid that Gerald won't be my heir. I needn't tell you I have not the slightest intention of marrying.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. You come too late. My son has no need of you. You are not necessary.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What do you mean, Rachel?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. That you are not necessary to Gerald's career. He does not require you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I do not understand you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Look into the garden. [LORD ILLINGWORTH rises and goes towards window.] You had better not let them see you: you bring unpleasant memories. [LORD ILLINGWORTH looks out and starts.] She loves him. They love each other. We are safe from you, and we are going away.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Where?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. We will not tell you, and if you find us we will not know you. You seem surprised. What welcome would you get from the girl whose lips you tried to soil, from the boy whose life you have shamed, from the mother whose dishonour comes from you?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You have grown hard, Rachel.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I was too weak once. It is well for me that I have changed.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I was very young at the time. We men know life too early.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. And we women know life too late. That is the difference between men and women. [A pause.]

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Rachel, I want my son. My money may be of no use to him now. I may be of no use to him, but I want my son. Bring us together, Rachel. You can do it if you choose. [Sees letter on table.]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. There is no room in my boy's life for you. He is not interested in YOU.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Then why does he write to me?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. What do you mean?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What letter is this? [Takes up letter.]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. That - is nothing. Give it to me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is addressed to ME.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. You are not to open it. I forbid you to open it.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. And in Gerald's handwriting.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It was not to have been sent. It is a letter he wrote to you this morning, before he saw me. But he is sorry now he wrote it, very sorry. You are not to open it. Give it to me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It belongs to me. [Opens it, sits down and reads it slowly. MRS. ARBUTHNOT watches him all the time.] You have read this letter, I suppose, Rachel?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. No.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You know what is in it?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Yes!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I don't admit for a moment that the boy is right in what he says. I don't admit that it is any duty of mine to marry you. I deny it entirely. But to get my son back I am ready - yes, I am ready to marry you, Rachel - and to treat you always with the deference and respect due to my wife. I will marry you as soon as you choose. I give you my word of honour.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. You made that promise to me once before and broke it.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I will keep it now. And that will show you that I love my son, at least as much as you love him. For when I marry you, Rachel, there are some ambitions I shall have to surrender. High ambitions, too, if any ambition is high.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I decline to marry you, Lord Illingworth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Are you serious?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Yes.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Do tell me your reasons. They would interest me enormously.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I have already explained them to my son.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I suppose they were intensely sentimental,

weren't they? You women live by your emotions and for them. You have no philosophy of life.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. You are right. We women live by our emotions and for them. By our passions, and for them, if you will. I have two passions, Lord Illingworth: my love of him, my hate of you. You cannot kill those. They feed each other.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What sort of love is that which needs to have hate as its brother?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It is the sort of love I have for Gerald. Do you think that terrible? Well it is terrible. All love is terrible. All love is a tragedy. I loved you once, Lord Illingworth. Oh, what a tragedy for a woman to have loved you!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. So you really refuse to marry me?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Yes.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Because you hate me?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Yes.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. And does my son hate me as you do?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. No.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I am glad of that, Rachel.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He merely despises you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What a pity! What a pity for him, I mean.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Don't be deceived, George. Children begin by loving their parents. After a time they judge them. Rarely if ever do they forgive them.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. [Reads letter over again, very slowly.] May I ask by what arguments you made the boy who wrote this letter, this beautiful, passionate letter, believe that you should not marry his father, the father of your own child?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It was not I who made him see it. It was another.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What FIN-DE-SIECLE person?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. The Puritan, Lord Illingworth. [A pause.]

LORD ILLINGWORTH. [Winces, then rises slowly and goes over to

table where his hat and gloves are. MRS. ARBUTHNOT is standing close to the table. He picks up one of the gloves, and begins pulling it on.] There is not much then for me to do here, Rachel?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Nothing.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is good-bye, is it?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. For ever, I hope, this time, Lord Illingworth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. How curious! At this moment you look exactly as you looked the night you left me twenty years ago. You have just the same expression in your mouth. Upon my word, Rachel, no woman ever loved me as you did. Why, you gave yourself to me like a flower, to do anything I liked with. You were the prettiest of playthings, the most fascinating of small romances . . . [Pulls out watch.] Quarter to two! Must be strolling back to Hunstanton. Don't suppose I shall see you there again. I'm sorry, I am, really. It's been an amusing experience to have met amongst people of one's own rank, and treated quite seriously too, one's mistress, and one's -

[MRS. ARBUTHNOT snatches up glove and strikes LORD ILLINGWORTH across the face with it. LORD ILLINGWORTH starts. He is dazed by the insult of his punishment. Then he controls himself, and goes to window and looks out at his son. Sighs and leaves the room.]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. [Falls sobbing on the sofa.] He would have said it. He would have said it.

[Enter GERALD and HESTER from the garden.]

GERALD. Well, dear mother. You never came out after all. So we have come in to fetch you. Mother, you have not been crying?
[Kneels down beside her.]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. My boy! My boy! My boy! [Running her fingers through his hair.]

HESTER. [Coming over.] But you have two children now. You'll let me be your daughter?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. [Looking up.] Would you choose me for a mother?

HESTER. You of all women I have ever known.

[They move towards the door leading into garden with their arms round each other's waists. GERALD goes to table L.C. for his hat. On turning round he sees LORD ILLINGWORTH'S glove lying on the floor, and picks it up.]

GERALD. Hallo, mother, whose glove is this? You have had a visitor. Who was it?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. [Turning round.] Oh! no one. No one in particular. A man of no importance.

CURTAIN

End of the Project Gutenberg eText A Woman of No Importance



LANDED GENTRY

CHARACTERS

CLAUDE INSOLEY
REV. ARCHIBALD INSOLEY
HENRY COBBETT
GANN
MOORE
GRACE INSOLEY
MRS. INSOLEY
MISS VERNON OF FOLEY
MISS HALL
EDITH LEWIS
MARGARET GANN

The Action takes place at Kenyon-Fulton, Claude Insoley's place in Somersetshire.

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LANDED GENTRY

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE: _The drawing-room at Kenyon-Fulton. It is a handsome apartment with large windows, reaching to the ground. On the walls are old masters whose darkness conceals their artistic insignificance. The furniture is fine and solid. Nothing is very new or smart. The chintzes have a rather pallid Victorian air. The

room with its substantial magnificence represents the character of a family rather than the taste of an individual._

It is night and one or two electric lamps are burning.

MOORE, _an elderly impressive butler, comes in, followed by_ GANN.
This is CLAUDE INSOLEY'S _gamekeeper, a short, sturdy man, grizzled, with wild stubborn hair and a fringe of beard round his chin. He wears his Sunday clothes of sombre broadcloth._

MOORE.

You're to wait here.

[GANN, _hat in hand, advances to the middle of the room_.

MOORE.

They've not got up from dinner yet, but he'll come and see you at once.

GANN.

I'll wait.

MOORE.

He said I was to tell him the moment you come. What can he be wanting of you at this time of night?

GANN.

Maybe if he wished you to know he'd have told you.

MOORE.

I don't want to know what don't concern me.

GANN.

Pity there ain't more like you.

MOORE.

It's the missus' birthday to-day.

GANN.

Didn't he say you was to tell him the moment I come?

MOORE.

I've only just took in the dessert. Give 'em a minute to sample the peaches.

GANN.

I thought them was your orders.

MOORE.

You're a nice civil-spoken one, you are.

[_With an effort_ GANN _prevents himself from replying. It is as much as he can do to keep his hands off the sleek, obsequious butler._ MOORE _after a glance at him goes out. The gamekeeper begins to walk up and down the room like a caged beast. In a moment he hears a sound and stops still. He turns his hat round and round in his hands._

[CLAUDE INSOLEY _comes in. He is a man of thirty-five, rather dried-up, rather precise, neither good-looking nor plain, with a slightly dogmatic, authoritative manner._

CLAUDE.

Good evening, Gann.

GANN.

Good evening, sir.

[CLAUDE _hesitates for a moment; to conceal a slight embarrassment he lights a cigarette_. GANN _watches him steadily_.

CLAUDE.

I suppose you know what I've sent for you about.

GANN.

No, sir.

CLAUDE.

I should have thought you might guess without hurting yourself. The Rector tells me that your daughter Peggy came back last night.

GANN.

Yes, sir.

CLAUDE.

Bit thick, isn't it?

GANN.

I don't know what you mean, sir.

CLAUDE.

Oh, that's all rot, Gann. You know perfectly well what I mean. It's a beastly matter for both of us, but it's no goodfunking it.... You've been on the estate pretty well all your life, haven't you?

GANN.

It's fifty-four years come next Michaelmas that my father was took on, and I was earning wages here before you was born.

CLAUDE.

My governor always said you were the best keeper he ever struck, and hang it all, I haven't had anything to complain about either.

GANN.

Thank you, sir.

CLAUDE.

Anyhow, we shan't make it any better by beating about the bush. It appears that Peggy has got into trouble in London.... I'm awfully sorry for you, and all that sort of thing.

GANN.

Poor child. She's not to blame.

[CLAUDE _gives a slight shrug of the shoulders_.

GANN.

I want 'er to forget all she's gone through. It was a mistake she ever went to London, but she would go. Now I'll keep 'er beside me. She'll never leave me again till I'm put underground.

CLAUDE.

That's all very fine and large, but I'm afraid Peggy can't stay on here,

Gann.

GANN.

Why not?

CLAUDE.

You know the rule of the estate as well as I do. When a girl gets into a mess she has to go.

GANN.

It's a wicked rule!

CLAUDE.

You never thought so before, and this isn't the first time you've seen it applied, by a long chalk.

GANN.

The girl went away once and come to grief. She wellnigh killed herself with the shame of it. I'm not going to let 'er out of my sight again.

CLAUDE.

I'm afraid I can't make an exception in your favour, Gann.

GANN.

[_Desperately._] Where's she to go to?

CLAUDE.

Oh, I expect she'll be able to get a job somewhere. Mrs. Insoley'll do all she can.

GANN.

It's no good, Squire. I can't let 'er go. I want 'er.

CLAUDE.

I don't want to be unreasonable. I'll give you a certain amount of time to make arrangements.

GANN.

Time's no good to me. I haven't the 'eart to send her away.

CLAUDE.

I'm afraid it's not a question of whether you like it or not. You must do as you're told.

GANN.

I can't part with her, and there's an end of it.

CLAUDE.

You'd better go and talk it over with your wife.

GANN.

I don't want to talk it over with anyone. I've made up my mind.

[CLAUDE _is silent for a moment. He looks at_ GANN _thoughtfully_.

CLAUDE.

[_Deliberately._] I'll give you twenty-four hours to think about it.

GANN.

[_Startled._] What d'you mean by that, sir?

CLAUDE.

If Peggy isn't gone by that time, I am afraid I shall have to send you away.

GANN.

You wouldn't do that, sir? You couldn't do it, Squire, not after all these years.

CLAUDE.

We'll soon see about that, my friend.

GANN.

You can't dismiss me for that. I'll have the law of you. I'll sue you for wrongful dismissal.

CLAUDE.

You can do what you damned well like; but if Peggy hasn't gone by

to-morrow night I shall turn you off the estate on Tuesday.

GANN.

[_Hoarsely._] You wouldn't do it! You couldn't do it.

[_There is a sound of talking and laughter, and of a general movement as the dining-room door is opened._]

CLAUDE.

They're just coming in. You'd better hook it.

[MISS VERNON _and_ EDITH LEWIS _come in, followed by_ GRACE. _For a moment_ GANN _stands awkwardly, and then leaves the room_. MISS VERNON _is a slight, faded, rather gaunt woman of thirty-five. Her deliberate manner, her composure, suggest a woman of means and a woman who knows her own mind._ EDITH LEWIS _is a pretty girl of twenty_. GRACE _is thirty. She is a beautiful creature with an eager, earnest face and fine eyes. She has a restless manner, and her frequent laughter strikes you as forced. She is always falling from one emotion to another. She uses a slightly satirical note when she speaks to her husband._]

EDITH.

[_Going to the window._] Oh, what a lovely night! Do let's go out. [_To_ GRACE.] May we?

GRACE.

Of course, if you want to.

EDITH.

I'm perfectly sick with envy every time I look out of the window. Those lovely old trees!

GRACE.

I wonder if you'd be sick with envy if you looked at nothing else for forty-six weeks in the year?

EDITH.

I adore the country.

GRACE.

People who habitually live in London generally do.

MISS VERNON.

Aren't you fond of the country?

GRACE.

[_Vehemently._] I hate it! I hate it with all my heart and soul.

CLAUDE.

My dear Grace, what are you saying?

GRACE.

It bores me. It bores me stiff. Those endless trees, and those dreary meadows, and those ploughed fields. Oh!

EDITH.

I don't think I could ever get tired of the view from your dining-room.

GRACE.

Not if you saw it for three meals a day for ten years? Oh, my dear, you don't know what that view is like at an early breakfast on a winter's morning. You sit there looking at it, with icy fingers, wondering if your nose is red, while your husband reads morning prayers, because his father read morning prayers before him; and the sky looks as if it were going to sink down and crush you.

CLAUDE.

You can't expect sunshine all the year round, can you?

GRACE.

[_Smiling._] True, O King!

EDITH.

Well, I'm a Cockney, and I feel inclined to fall down on my very knees and worship those big trees in your park. Oh, what a night!

MISS VERNON.

In such a night as this,
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees
And they did make no noise....

[MISS VERNON _and_ EDITH LEWIS _go out_. GRACE _is left alone with her husband_.

GRACE.

What on earth was Gann doing here?

CLAUDE.

I had something to say to him.

GRACE.

May I know what?

CLAUDE.

It would only bore you.

GRACE.

That wouldn't be a new experience.

CLAUDE.

I say, you're looking jolly to-night, darling.

GRACE.

It's kind of you to say so.

CLAUDE.

Were you pleased with the necklace I gave you this morning?

GRACE.

[_Smiling._] Surely I said so at the time.

CLAUDE.

I was rather hoping you'd wear it to-night.

GRACE.

It wouldn't have gone with my frock.

CLAUDE.

You might have put it on all the same.

GRACE.

You see, your example hasn't been lost on me. I've learnt to put propriety before sentiment.

CLAUDE.

[_Rather shyly._] I should have thought, if you cared for me, you wouldn't have minded.

GRACE.

Are you reproaching me?

CLAUDE.

No!

GRACE.

Only?

CLAUDE.

Hang it all, I can't help wishing sometimes you'd seem as if--you were fond of me, don't you know.

GRACE.

If you'll point out anything you particularly object to in my behaviour, I'll try to change it.

CLAUDE.

My dear, I don't want much, do I?

GRACE.

I don't know why you should choose this particular time to make a scene.

CLAUDE.

Hang it all, I'm not making a scene!

GRACE.

I beg your pardon, I forgot that only women make scenes.

CLAUDE.

I only wanted to tell you that I'm just about as fond of you as I can stick.

GRACE.

[_Suddenly touched._] After ten years of holy matrimony?

CLAUDE.

It seems about ten days to me.

GRACE.

Good God, to me it seems a lifetime.

CLAUDE.

I say, Grace, what d'you mean by that?

GRACE.

[_Recovering herself._] Oughtn't you to go back to the dining-room? Your brother and Mr. Cobbett will be boring one another.

[CLAUDE _looks at her for a moment, then rises and goes out_. GRACE _clenches her hands, and an expression of utter wretchedness crosses her face. She passes her hand across her eyes with an impatient gesture, as if she were trying to shake herself free from some torturing thought._ MOORE _comes in with coffee on a salver_.

GRACE.

Put it down on the table.

MOORE.

Yes, madam.

GRACE.

Miss Vernon's in the garden with Miss Lewis. Will you tell them that coffee is here?

MOORE.

Very good, ma'am.

[_He goes out of one of the French windows into the garden. In a moment_ MISS VERNON _comes in_.

GRACE.

Isn't Edith coming?

MISS VERNON.

I sent her to get a wrap. We want to go down to the lake.

GRACE.

Will you have some coffee?

MISS VERNON.

Thank you.... I was trying to remember how long it is since I was here last.

GRACE.

[_Pouring out the coffee._] It was before I was married.

MISS VERNON.

I'm devoted to Kenyon, I'm so glad you asked me to come and spend Whitsun here.

GRACE.

My mother-in-law wrote and told us that you weren't engaged.

MISS VERNON.

[_With a smile._] That sounds rather chilly.

GRACE.

Does it?

MISS VERNON.

[_Abruptly._] May I call you Grace?

GRACE.

[_Looking up, faintly surprised._] Certainly. If you wish it.

MISS VERNON.

My name is Helen.

GRACE.

Is it?

[MISS VERNON _gives a slight smile of amusement, then gets up and stands before the fire-place with her hands behind her back_.]

MISS VERNON.

I wonder why you dislike me so much?

GRACE.

I don't know why you should think I do.

MISS VERNON.

You don't take much trouble to hide it, do you?

GRACE.

I'm sorry. In future I'll be more careful.

MISS VERNON.

[_Rather wistfully._] I wanted to be great friends with you.

GRACE.

I'm afraid I don't make friends very easily.

MISS VERNON.

We live so near one another. It seems rather silly that we should only just be on speaking terms.

[_A very short pause._]

GRACE.

They wanted Claude to marry you, didn't they? And he married me instead.

MISS VERNON.

When I saw you at your wedding, I couldn't help feeling I'd have done just the same in his place.

GRACE.

[_With a twinkle in her eye._] And now they want you to marry his brother Archibald.

MISS VERNON.

[_Smiling._] So I understand.

GRACE.

Are you going to?

MISS VERNON.

He hasn't asked me yet.

GRACE.

Five thousand acres in a ring fence. It seems a pity to let it go out of the family.

MISS VERNON.

It's such a nuisance that a plainish woman of six-and-thirty has to be taken along with it.

GRACE.

Did you ever care for Claude?

MISS VERNON.

If I did or not, I'm very anxious to care for his wife.

GRACE.

Why?

MISS VERNON.

Well, partly because I'm afraid you're not very happy.

GRACE.

[_Startled._] I? [_Almost defiantly._] I should have thought I had everything that a woman can want to make her happy. I've got a husband who adores me. We're rich. We're--[_with a sudden break in her voice_]--happy! I wish to God he had married you! It's clear enough now that he made a mistake.

MISS VERNON.

[_With a chuckle._] I don't think it's occurred to him, you know.

GRACE.

How many times d'you suppose his mother has said to Claude: Things would be very different now if you'd had the sense to marry Helen Vernon.

MISS VERNON.

Yes, in that case I must say it's not to be wondered at if you don't like me very much.

GRACE.

Like you! I hate you with all my heart and soul!

MISS VERNON.

Good gracious me, you don't say so?

GRACE.

[_With a sudden flash of humour._] You don't mind my telling you, do you?

MISS VERNON.

Not a bit, but I should very much like to know why?

GRACE.

Because I've got an envious disposition and I envy you.

MISS VERNON.

A solitary old maid like me?

GRACE.

You've got everything that I haven't got. D'you suppose I've lived ten years in my husband's family without realising the gulf that separates Miss Vernon of Foley from the very middle-class young woman that Claude Insoley was such a damned fool as to marry? You've got money and I haven't a farthing.

MISS VERNON.

Money isn't everything.

GRACE.

Oh, don't talk such nonsense! How would you like to be dependent on somebody else for every penny you had? If I want to get Claude a Christmas present I have to buy it out of his money.... It wouldn't be so maddening if I only had forty pounds a year of my own, but I haven't a penny, not a penny! And I have to keep accounts. After all, it's his money. If he wants accounts why shouldn't he have them? I have to write down the cost of every packet of hair-pins. [_With a sudden chuckle._] And the worst of it is, I never could add.

MISS VERNON.

That, of course, must increase the difficulty of keeping accounts.

GRACE.

I've been an utter failure from the beginning. They despised me because I was a nobody and not even a rich nobody; but I was a strapping, healthy sort of young woman and they consoled themselves by thinking I'd have children--a milch cow was what they wanted--and I haven't even had children....

[MISS VERNON, _not knowing what to say, makes a little gesture of perplexity and helplessness. There is a brief pause._]

GRACE.

Oh! I'm about fed up with all the humiliations I've had to endure.

[EDITH LEWIS _comes in with a wrap which she gives to_ MISS VERNON.]

EDITH.

Will this do?

MISS VERNON.

Thanks so much. You're a perfect angel.

GRACE.

You mustn't stay out more than a few minutes. The men will be here in a moment, and I want to play poker. When my mother-in-law comes we shall have to mind our p's and q's.

EDITH.

You don't like Mrs. Insoley?

GRACE.

Mrs. Insoley doesn't like me.

MISS VERNON.

Nonsense! She's very fond of you indeed.

GRACE.

I could wish she had some pleasanter way of showing it than finding fault with everything I do, everything I say, and everything I wear.

EDITH.

She's coming to-morrow, isn't she?

GRACE.

Yes. [_With a quizzical smile._] She'll thoroughly disapprove of you. When I introduce you to her: This is Miss Lewis--she'll look at you for a moment as if you were a kitchen-maid applying for a situation and say: Lewis.

EDITH.

Why?

GRACE.

Because, like myself, you're not county.

EDITH.

Oh!

GRACE.

It's all very fine to say: Oh! but you don't know what that means. In London, if you're pretty and amusing and don't give yourself airs, people are quite ready to be nice to you; but in a place like this, you can have every virtue under the sun, and if you're not county you're of no importance in this world, and you'll certainly be very uncomfortable in the next.

MISS VERNON.

[_Smiling._] I think you're extremely hard on us. If you have the advantage of....

GRACE.

[_Seizing the opportunity which_ MISS VERNON'S _hesitation gives her_.]
Middle-class origins?

MISS VERNON.

You needn't grudge us the perfectly harmless delusion that there is a difference between a family that has lived in the same place for three or four centuries, with traditions of good breeding and service to the country--and one that has no roots in the soil.

GRACE.

I seem to hear Claude's very words.

MISS VERNON.

[_Good-humouredly._] Of course we have our faults.

GRACE.

You're the first member of your class that I've ever heard acknowledge it.

MISS VERNON.

[_Meditatively._] I wonder if you'd despise us so much if you had a string of drunken, fox-hunting squires behind you.

GRACE.

Oh, my dear, when I was first married I used to lie awake at night wishing for them with all my heart. When the neighbours came to call on me I could see them obviously lying in wait for the aitches they were expecting me to drop. A Miss Robinson, wasn't she? Robinson! Are there people called Robinson? Oh, how I wanted to scratch their ugly old faces!

MISS VERNON.

How lucky I was abroad for so long! You might have disfigured me for life.

GRACE.

I've often thought that if the Archangel Gabriel came down in Somersetshire, they'd look him out in the "Landed Gentry" before they asked him to a shooting-party.

MISS VERNON.

I don't think you ought to judge us all on Mrs. Insoley. She's a type that's dying out.

EDITH.

I don't want to seem inquisitive, but if you don't like Mrs. Insoley why on earth d'you have her to stay here?

GRACE.

Simple-minded child! Because even in a county family money's the only thing in the world that really matters, and we're penniless, while Mrs. Insoley--[with a quick, defiant look at_ MISS VERNON]--Mrs. Insoley stinks of it.... Do I shock you?

MISS VERNON.

[_With a smile._] No, because I see you're trying to.

GRACE.

Claude has nothing but the house and land and his principles. And if we're able to have the hounds and the shooting and a couple of cars, it's because Mrs. Insoley pays for it.

MISS VERNON.

[_Explaining to_ EDITH LEWIS.] Mrs. Insoley was an heiress.

GRACE.

She was a Bainbridge, and you'll hear her thank God for it frequently.

[ARCHIBALD INSOLEY _and_ HENRY COBBETT _come in_. ARCHIBALD _is a pleasant, good-looking man of thirty-four, with a humorous way about him, and a kindly expression. He holds the family living of Kenyon-Fulton, but there is nothing in him of the sanctimoniousness of the cloth._ COBBETT _is an agreeable youth of four-and-twenty. They are followed by_ CLAUDE INSOLEY.

COBBETT.

[_Seeing_ EDITH LEWIS _at the window_.] Are you going out?

EDITH.

We were--but we won't.

GRACE.

I've been preparing Miss Lewis for your mother's arrival.

EDITH.

I'm beginning to tremble in my shoes.

ARCHIBALD.

Our mother is what is usually described as a woman of character. With the best intentions in the world and the highest principles she succeeds in making life almost intolerable to every one connected with her.

CLAUDE.

You won't forget to send the carriage for her to-morrow, Grace?

GRACE.

I won't.... Last time we sent the car by mistake, and she sent it back again.

MISS VERNON.

Good heavens, why did she do that?

GRACE.

Mrs. Insoley never has driven in a motor-car, and Mrs. Insoley never will drive in a motor-car.

CLAUDE.

[_Not unamiably._] I don't think you ought to make fun of my mother, Grace.

GRACE.

I wouldn't if I could make anything else of her.

[_As she says this she sits down at the piano and rattles her fingers over the keys._]

GRACE.

Will you sing us a song, Mr. Cobbett?

COBBETT.

No, thank you.

GRACE.

I want to be amused.

ARCHIBALD.

How desperately you say that!

GRACE.

[_To_ COBBETT.] What will you sing?

COBBETT.

I'm afraid I don't know anything that will fit the occasion.

GRACE.

I seem to have heard you warble a graceful little ditty about a top note.

COBBETT.

Thank you very much, but I'm not fond of making a fool of myself.

GRACE.

Part of a gentleman's education should be how to make himself ridiculous with dignity.

CLAUDE.

[_To_ COBBETT.] You make more fuss about singing than a young lady at a tea-party.

GRACE.

[_Looking at him with smiling lips but with hard eyes._] Let us have no more maidenly coyness.

[_She begins to play, and_ COBBETT, _shrugging his shoulders, begins with rather bad grace to sing the song, "I can't reach that top note." While they are in the middle of it the door opens, and the_ BUTLER _announces_ MRS. INSOLEY _and her companion_. MRS. INSOLEY _is a little old lady of some corpulence, shabbily dressed in rusty black. She looks rather like a charwoman in her Sunday best._ MISS HALL, _her companion, is a self-effacing silent person of uncertain age. She is always very anxious to make herself

useful._

MOORE.

Mrs. Insoley, Miss Hall.

CLAUDE.

Mother!

[_The singing abruptly ceases. There is general consternation._
MRS. INSOLEY _stops still for one moment, and surveys the party
with indignation. Then she sweeps into the room with such majesty
as is compatible with her small size and considerable obesity._

MRS. INSOLEY.

Is this a lunatic asylum that I have come into?

GRACE.

We didn't expect you till to-morrow.

MRS. INSOLEY.

So I imagined by the fact that I found no conveyance at the station. I
had to take a fly, and it cost me four-and-sixpence.

CLAUDE.

But why didn't you let us know you'd changed your plans, mother?

MRS. INSOLEY.

I did let you know. I wrote to Grace yesterday. She must have got my
letter this morning.

GRACE.

Oh, how stupid of me! I recognised your writing, and as it was my
birthday I thought I wouldn't open it till to-morrow.

CLAUDE.

Grace!

GRACE.

I'm dreadfully sorry.

MRS. INSOLEY.

It was only by the mercy of Providence that I didn't have to walk.

GRACE.

There are always flies at the station.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Providence might very well have caused them to be all engaged.

GRACE.

I don't know why you should think Providence has nothing better to do than to play practical jokes on us.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Looking round._] And may I inquire why you have turned the house in which your father died into a bear garden?

CLAUDE.

It's Grace's birthday, and we thought there would be no harm in our having a little fun.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Putting up her face-à-main and staring at the company._] I'm old-fashioned enough and well-bred enough to like people to be introduced to me.

GRACE.

Nowadays every one's so disreputable that we think it safer not to make introductions.... This is Miss Lewis.

EDITH.

How d'you do?

MRS. INSOLEY.

Lewis!

GRACE.

[_With a little smile of amusement._] I think you know Miss Vernon of Foley.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Very affably._] Of course I know Miss Vernon of Foley. My dear Helen, you're looking very handsome. It wants a woman of birth to wear the outrageous costumes of the present day.

MISS VERNON.

[_Shaking hands with her._] It's so nice of you to say so.

GRACE.

I forget if you know Mr. Cobbett.

COBBETT.

How do you do?

[_He bows slightly as_ MRS. INSOLEY _looks at him through her glasses_.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Cobbett!

COBBETT.

[_With some asperity._] Cobbett!

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Turning to_ MISS HALL.] We used to have a milkman called Cobbett, Louisa.

MISS HALL.

Our milkman is called Wilkinson now.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Very graciously._] You were singing a song when I came in. What was it called?

COBBETT.

[_Rather sulkily._] "I can't reach that top note."

MRS. INSOLEY.

I wondered why you were trying.... Why are you hiding behind that sofa, Archibald? Do you not intend to kiss your mother?

ARCHIBALD.

I'm delighted to see you, my dear mother.

[_He kisses her on the forehead._]

MRS. INSOLEY.

I'm rather surprised to see a clergyman at a dinner-party on a Sunday night.

ARCHIBALD.

I find two sermons a day excellent for the appetite. And the Bible tells us that corn makes the young men cheerful.

GRACE.

[_Smiling._] Aren't you dreadfully hungry? Wouldn't you like something to eat?

MRS. INSOLEY.

No, I shall go straight to my room. It always upsets me to drive in a hired carriage.

GRACE.

I'll just go and see that everything's nice and comfortable.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Pray don't put yourself to any trouble on my account. It would distress me.

[GRACE _goes out_.

EDITH.

[_Aside to_ MISS VERNON.] Don't you think we might go down to the lake?

MISS VERNON.

By all means.... There's nothing I can get you, Mrs. Insoley?

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Graciously._] Nothing, my dear Helen.

[MISS VERNON _and_ EDITH LEWIS _go out, and a moment later_ COBBETT
slips out also.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Claude, will you take Miss Hall into the dining-room and give her a sandwich and a glass of port?

CLAUDE.

Certainly.

MISS HALL.

I don't think I want anything, thank you, Mrs. Insoley.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Nonsense, Louisa! Allow me to know what is good for you. You'll see that she drinks the port, Claude. [_As they go out._] I want to talk to Archibald.

ARCHIBALD.

My dear mother, I throw myself at your feet.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_With a chuckle._] I very much doubt if you could. You're growing much too fat. It's quite time they made you something.

ARCHIBALD.

[_Smiling._] The landed gentry hasn't its old power. Promotion in the Church nowadays is given with new-fangled ideas about merit and scholarship and heaven knows what.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I hope you never eat potatoes or bread?

ARCHIBALD.

I fly from them as I would from temptation.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Nor soup?

ARCHIBALD.

It is as the scarlet woman to me.

MRS. INSOLEY.

And I trust you never touch green peas.

ARCHIBALD.

Ah, there you have me. Even the saints had their weaknesses. I confess that when green peas are in season I always put on flesh.

MRS. INSOLEY.

You want some one to keep a firm hand on you. You must marry.

ARCHIBALD.

I saw you approaching that topic by leaps and bounds, mother.

MRS. INSOLEY.

It's a clergyman's duty to marry.

ARCHIBALD.

[_Chaffing her._] St. Paul says....

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Interrupting._] I know what St. Paul's views were, Archibald, and I disagree with them.

ARCHIBALD.

[_Dryly._] I have every reason to believe he was of excellent family, mother.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Giving him a quick look._] We all know that it was a great disappointment to Helen Vernon when--you know what I mean.

ARCHIBALD.

I can't help thinking she showed bad taste in surviving the blow.

MRS. INSOLEY.

It was a great disappointment to me. I had set my heart on joining Foley to Kenyon-Fulton.... It wouldn't be too late even now if you had the sense to appreciate Helen Vernon's affection for you.

ARCHIBALD.

My dear mother, I can't persuade myself for a moment that Helen Vernon has any affection for me.

MRS. INSOLEY.

A woman of her age is prepared to have affection for any one who asks her to marry him.

ARCHIBALD.

Even if he's a poor country parson?

MRS. INSOLEY.

You're a great deal more than a country parson, Archibald. It is unlikely that Grace will have any children, so unless--something happens to allow Claude to marry again....

ARCHIBALD.

What d'you mean by that, mother?

MRS. INSOLEY.

Grace is not immortal.

ARCHIBALD.

On the other hand, she has excellent health.

MRS. INSOLEY.

There may be other ways of disposing of her.

ARCHIBALD.

What ways?

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Looking at him calmly._] Since when have you laboured under the delusion that I am the sort of woman to submit to cross-examination, Archibald?

[_The entrance of_ GRACE _interrupts the conversation_.

GRACE.

I hope I haven't kept you waiting. I think you'll find everything all right.

MRS. INSOLEY.

In that case I shall go to my room. Archibald, tell Louisa that I am ready to go to my room.

ARCHIBALD.

Certainly.

[_He goes out, leaving_ GRACE _alone with_ MRS. INSOLEY.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Who is the young lady you have staying with you, Grace?

GRACE.

Edith Lewis. She's a friend of mine.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Ah! And who is this Mr. Cobbett?

GRACE.

He's a friend of mine too.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I didn't imagine that you would invite total strangers to stay with you.

GRACE.

I don't know that there's any other way of describing them.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I dare say that is a sufficient description in itself.

[MISS HALL _comes back with_ CLAUDE _and_ ARCHIBALD.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I'm going to my room, Louisa. I shall be ready for you to read to me in a quarter of an hour.

MISS HALL.

Very good, Mrs. Insoley. [_To_ GRACE.] I suppose you don't have prayers on Sunday night?

GRACE.

No, we read our pedigree instead. You'll find the "Landed Gentry" in your bedroom.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Icily._] In my young days it was thought more important for a young lady to be well-born than to be clever.

GRACE.

[_Chuckling._] The result has been disastrous for the present generation.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Good night.

GRACE.

[_Shaking hands cordially with_ MISS HALL.] Be sure and let me know if you're not quite comfortable. I hope you'll find everything you want in your room.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Of course Louisa will find everything she wants. She wants nothing. Come, Louisa.

[MRS. INSOLEY _and_ MISS HALL _go out_.]

ARCHIBALD.

I think I'll be toddling back to my rectory.

CLAUDE.

Oh, all right.

ARCHIBALD.

Good night, Grace.

GRACE.

Good night.

CLAUDE.

[_To_ ARCHIBALD.] I talked to Gann about that matter.

ARCHIBALD.

I'm afraid he's going to make rather a nuisance of himself.

CLAUDE.

I took a good firm line, you know.

ARCHIBALD.

That's right. It's the only way with those sort of fellows. Good night, old man.

CLAUDE.

Good night.

[ARCHIBALD _goes out_.

CLAUDE.

You were asking about Gann just now, Grace?

GRACE.

I was.

CLAUDE.

At first I thought I'd better not tell you anything about it, but I've been thinking it over....

GRACE.

[_Interrupting._] It was quite unnecessary. I'm not at all curious.

CLAUDE.

I think perhaps it would be better if I told you what I'd done.

GRACE.

I'm sure that whatever you've done is right, Claude. [_Smiling._] That's why you're so detestable.

CLAUDE.

That's all very fine and large, but I think I'd like to have your approval.

GRACE.

We agreed very early in our married life that your acts were such as must necessarily meet with my approval.

CLAUDE.

What's the matter with you, Grace?

GRACE.

With me? Nothing.

CLAUDE.

You've been so funny lately. I haven't been able to make you out at all.

GRACE.

I should have thought you had more important things to do than to bother about me.

CLAUDE.

I've got nothing in the world to do more important than to bother about you, Grace.

[_She looks at him for an instant, with a catch in her breath._]

GRACE.

Don't worry me to-night, Claude; my head's aching so that I feel I could scream.

CLAUDE.

[_With the tenderest concern._] My poor child, why didn't you tell me? I'm so sorry I've been bothering you. Is it very bad?

GRACE.

What a beast I am! How can you like me when I'm so absolutely horrid to you?

CLAUDE.

My darling, I don't blame you for having a headache.

GRACE.

I'm sorry I was beastly to you just now.

CLAUDE.

What nonsense!

[_He tries to take her in his arms, but she draws herself away._]

GRACE.

Please don't, Claude.

CLAUDE.

Why don't you go to bed, darling?

GRACE.

[_With a cry of something like fright._] Oh, no!

CLAUDE.

Bed's the best place for everybody at this hour.

GRACE.

I want to amuse myself. Go and fetch the others, they're down by the lake. And we'll all play poker.

[_He is just going to make an observation, but she bursts in vehemently._]

GRACE.

For God's sake do as I ask you.

[_He looks at her. With a shrug of the shoulders he goes out into the garden._] GRACE _gives a deep sigh. In a moment_ HENRY COBBETT

enters. GRACE _looks at him silently as he advances into the room_.

COBBETT.

I've been waiting for the chance of speaking to you by yourself.

GRACE.

Have you?

COBBETT.

Why did you make me sing that idiotic song just now?

GRACE.

[_Her eyes cold and hostile._] Because I chose.

COBBETT.

You made me look a perfect fool.

GRACE.

That's what I wanted to make you look.

COBBETT.

[_Surprised._] Did you? Why?

GRACE.

I have no explanation to offer.

COBBETT.

You know, I'm hanged if I can make you out. You're never the same for two minutes together.

GRACE.

[_Frigidly._] I suppose it is disconcerting. Claude complains of it too.

COBBETT.

Oh, hang Claude.

GRACE.

You're growing more and more like him every day, Harry.

COBBETT.

I don't quite know what you mean by that.

GRACE.

It seems hardly worth while to have--made a long journey to find oneself exactly where one started.

COBBETT.

I never know what people are driving at when they talk metaphorically.

GRACE.

[_Looking at him deliberately._] I thought I loved you, Harry.

COBBETT.

You've said it often enough.

GRACE.

[_Slowly._] I wonder if I just said it to persuade myself. My heart's empty! Empty! I know now that it wasn't love I felt for you.

COBBETT.

It's rather late in the day to have found that out, isn't it?

GRACE.

[_Bitterly._] Yes, that's just it. It's late in the day for everything.... Here they are.

[_A sound of talking is heard as_ EDITH LEWIS _approaches with_ HELEN VERNON _and_ CLAUDE.

CLAUDE.

[_At the window._] I found them on their way back.

GRACE.

[_To_ COBBETT, _with a little bitter laugh_.] We're going to play poker.

END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

THE SCENE _is the same as in the preceding Act. It is evening, towards seven o'clock, but it is still perfectly light._ GRACE _and_ PEGGY GANN _are in the room, both standing_. PEGGY _is a pretty girl, quite young, but very pale, with black rings round her eyes. She is dressed like a housemaid in her going-out things._ GRACE _is evidently much distressed_.

PEGGY.

You will try, mum, won't you?

[PEGGY'S _voice seems to call_ GRACE _back with a start from her own thoughts_.

GRACE.

I ought to have been told before. It was wicked to keep it from me.

PEGGY.

I thought you knew, mum. I wasn't to know that you 'adn't been told anything.

GRACE.

[_With a friendly smile._] I'm not blaming you, Peggy.... Mr. Insoley's out now, but I'll talk to him as soon as she come in. You'd better go home and fetch your father.

PEGGY.

You know what father is, mum. I'm afraid he won't come.

GRACE.

Oh, but I think it's very important. Tell him that....

[HENRY COBBETT _comes in, and she stops when she sees him_.

COBBETT.

Hulloa, am I in the way? Shall I go?

GRACE.

[_Passing her hand wearily across her forehead._] No. I've just finished.... Try and get your father to come, Peggy.

PEGGY.

Well, I'll do what I can, mum.

[_She goes out._ GRACE _gives a little exclamation, partly of distress, partly of indignation_.

COBBETT.

What's the matter? You seem rather put out.

GRACE.

That's the daughter of one of the keepers. She came to me just now and asked me to beg Claude to give them a little more time. I hadn't an idea what she meant. Then she said Claude had told her father he must send her away within twenty-four hours or lose his place.

COBBETT.

[_Flippantly._] Oh, yes, I know. She seems to be rather a flighty young person. Claude and your brother-in-law were talking about it after lunch in the smoking-room.

GRACE.

Why didn't you tell me?

COBBETT.

Well, it never struck me you didn't know. Besides--you haven't shown any great desire for my society the last day or two.

GRACE.

[_With a quick look at him._] I've had other guests to attend to.

COBBETT.

[_Shrugging his shoulders._] And it seemed rather a sordid little story. I don't think I can interest myself very much at this time of day in the gamekeeper's daughter who kicks over the traces.

GRACE.

[_Sarcastically._] It's so devilish mid-Victorian, isn't it?

COBBETT.

[_Surprised at her tone._] It's not really bothering you, is it?

GRACE.

[_With a sudden vehement outburst._] Don't you see that wretched girl has done no more than I have?

COBBETT.

[_With a chuckle._] Great Scott, you haven't produced an unexpected baby, have you?

GRACE.

Oh, don't, don't.

COBBETT.

[_Coolly._] In point of fact she's done a great deal more than you have. She's been found out.

GRACE.

How can you be so odiously cynical?

COBBETT.

I notice people always call you odiously cynical when you talk plain horse-sense to them.

GRACE.

Can't you realise what I'm feeling? She had excuses. She was alone, and little more than a child; she had no education. How could she be expected to resist temptation?

COBBETT.

It's an absolute delusion that the lower classes are less able to resist temptation than their betters. In the first place, they have a much more systematic moral education, and then they're taught from early youth to look upon virtue as a valuable asset.

GRACE.

[_Going up to him suddenly._] Harry, would you mind very much if I stopped the whole thing?

COBBETT.

Of course I should mind.

GRACE.

Oh, no, don't say that because it's the conventional thing to say. I want you to be frank with me.

COBBETT.

[_Uneasily._] Why do you ask me now?

GRACE.

[_After a look at him, a little unwillingly._] I feel so horribly mean.

COBBETT.

Claude?

GRACE.

[_With a sort of appeal, as if she were excusing herself._] He's so awfully good to me, Harry. Every present he gives me, every kind word is like a stab in my heart. I'm beastly to him sometimes, I can't help it, but nothing seems to make any difference to him.... Whatever I do, he loves me.

COBBETT.

Are you beginning to care for Claude--differently?

GRACE.

Oh, it's no use pretending. I never loved him as he loved me. I couldn't. I was bored by his love. Yes, all the time we've been married.... It's only lately....

[_She pauses abruptly._ COBBETT _gives her a sidelong glance_.

COBBETT.

Oh!

GRACE.

I don't know what I feel or what to do. I'm so bewildered and wretched.... He bores me still--oh, horribly sometimes. And yet at

moments I feel as though I were a good deal more than half in love with him. It's too absurd. With Claude--after all these years. Something has changed me.... It's the last thing that ought to have changed me towards him.

[_She flushes hotly, and again_ COBBETT _looks at her, and a rather sulky expression comes into his face_.

COBBETT.

It's not a very pleasant position for me, is it?

GRACE.

I shouldn't have thought it ever had been a very pleasant position considering what a good friend Claude has been to you.

COBBETT.

If you look at it in that way, I dare say it would be better to put an end to the whole thing.

GRACE.

You have been rather a blackguard, haven't you?

COBBETT.

No. I don't pretend to be better than anybody else, but I'm quite certain I'm no worse. I'm a perfectly normal man in good health. It's idiotic to abuse me because I've done what any other fellow would have done in my place.

GRACE.

[_Suddenly understanding._] Is that all it was to you?

COBBETT.

What d'you mean?

GRACE.

Wasn't I anything to you at all? Only a more or less attractive woman who happened to cross your path? If I was only that, why couldn't you leave me alone? What harm did I ever do you? Oh, it was cruel of you. Cruel!

COBBETT.

[_Quietly._] No man's able to have an affair all by himself, you know.

GRACE.

What d'you mean by that?

COBBETT.

Well, most fellows are very shy, and they're dreadfully frightened of a rebuff. A man doesn't take much risk until--well, until he finds there's not much risk to take.

GRACE.

D'you mean to say I gave you to understand.... Oh, how can you humiliate me like that?

COBBETT.

Isn't there a certain amount of truth in it?

GRACE.

[_Looking as it were into her own soul._] Yes.... Oh, I'm so ashamed.

COBBETT.

The world would be a jolly sight easier place to live in if people weren't such humbugs.

GRACE.

[_Hardly able to believe the truth that presents itself to her, yet eager to probe it._] D'you think it was only curiosity on my side and nothing more than opportunity on yours?

COBBETT.

That's the foundation of nine love affairs out of ten, you know.

GRACE.

[_Trying to justify herself in her own eyes._] I was so bored--so lonely. I never felt at home with the people I had to live with. They humiliated me. And you seemed the same sort of person as I was. I felt at my ease with you. At first I thought you cared for the things I cared for--music and books and pictures: it took me quite a time to discover that you didn't know the difference between a fiddle and a jews' harp.... I wonder why you troubled to take me in.

COBBETT.

I naturally talked about what I thought would please you.

GRACE.

I remember at first I felt as if I were just stepping out of a prison into the fresh air. It seemed to me as if--oh, I don't know how to put it--as if spring flowers were suddenly blossoming in my heart.

COBBETT.

I'm afraid you were asking more from me than I was able to give you.

GRACE.

Oh, I don't blame you. You're quite right: it's I who am to blame.
[_With sudden vehemence._] Oh, how I envy that wretched girl! If she felt it was because she loved. I asked her who the man was, and she wouldn't tell me. She said she didn't want to get him into trouble. She must love him still.

COBBETT.

[_Moved by the pain which he sees she is suffering._] I hope you don't think me an awful skunk, Grace. I'm sorry we've made such a hash of things.

GRACE.

[_Going on with her own thoughts._] It would be horrible if that wretched girl were punished while I go scot-free. I can't let her be turned away like a leper. I should never rest in peace again.

COBBETT.

Claude's not very fond of going back on his word. He seems to have delivered an ultimatum, and I expect he'll stick to it.

GRACE.

It means so much to me. I feel somehow that if I can only save that poor child it'll make up in a way--oh, very little--for all the harm I've done.... D'you think I'm perfectly absurd?

COBBETT.

Life seems devilish complicated sometimes, doesn't it?

GRACE.

[_With a smile._] Devilish.

[_The sound is heard of a carriage stopping outside._]

COBBETT.

Hulloa, what's that?

GRACE.

It's my mother-in-law. She's been out for her drive. [_With a glance at her watch._] Claude ought to be in soon.

COBBETT.

What are you going to do?

GRACE.

I'm going to use every means in my power to persuade him to change his mind.

COBBETT.

You're not going to do anything foolish, Grace?

GRACE.

How d'you mean? [_His meaning suddenly strikes her._] You don't think I might have to.... Oh, that would be too much to ask me.... D'you think I might have to tell him?

COBBETT.

Whatever you do, Grace, I want you to know that if anything happens I'm willing to do the straight thing.

GRACE.

[_Shaking her head._] No, I should never ask you to marry me. Now we both know how things are between us--how they've always been....

COBBETT.

I'm awfully sorry, Grace.

GRACE.

There's no need to be. I'm glad to know the truth. There was nothing

that held us together before but my cowardice. I was so afraid of going back to that dreary loneliness. But you've given me courage.

COBBETT.

Is there nothing left of it at all?

GRACE.

So far as I'm concerned nothing at all--but shame.

[EDITH LEWIS _comes in_. GRACE, _recovering herself quickly, throws off her seriousness and greets the girl with a pleasant smile_.

EDITH.

We've had such a lovely drive.

GRACE.

And d'you think the country's as beautiful as ever?

EDITH.

[_Gaily._] Oh, I didn't look at the country. I was much too excited. Mrs. Insoley has been telling me the dreadful pasts of all the families in the neighbourhood. It appears the further they go back the more shocking their behaviour has been.

COBBETT.

I notice that even the grossest immorality becomes respectable when it's a hundred years old.

GRACE.

[_Ironically._] It's very hard, isn't it? Mrs. Grundy has no mercy. She'll take even you to her bosom before you know where you are.

[_Enter_ MRS. INSOLEY, _followed by_ MISS VERNON _and_ MISS HALL. MISS HALL _is carrying_ MRS. INSOLEY'S _lap-dog_.

GRACE.

I hope you enjoyed your drive.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I didn't go for my enjoyment, Grace; I went to exercise the horses.

GRACE.

[_Smiling._] Meanwhile, I hear you took the opportunity of enlarging Edith's young mind.

MISS VERNON.

[_To_ EDITH.] When you come to Foley you must remind me to show you the portraits of my great-grandmother, Mary Vernon. She had a tremendous affair with the Regent, you know.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Pleasantly._] My dear Helen, I have the greatest affection for you, but I cannot allow a statement like that to go unchallenged. There is no evidence whatever of the truth of it.

MISS VERNON.

I don't know how you can say that, Mrs. Insoley, considering that I have all my great-grandmother's letters to the Regent.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_With a chuckle._] Where are his letters to your great-grandmother?

MISS VERNON.

She gave them back at the time he returned hers, naturally.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I can see her. If she had any letters she would have kept them. Any woman would.

MISS VERNON.

[_Bridling a little._] I can't imagine why you should suddenly throw doubts on a story that the whole county has believed for a hundred years. Every one knew all about Mary Vernon.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Chaffing her._] I am aware that your great-grandmother was an abandoned hussy, but that in itself is no proof that she ever had anything to do with the Regent.

MISS VERNON.

You can't deny that he slept at Foley, Mrs. Insoley.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Only one night.

MISS VERNON.

Well?

MRS. INSOLEY.

It's notorious that at that very time he was on terms of the greatest intimacy with Pamela Bainbridge. [_To_ EDITH LEWIS.] I am not an Insoley, thank God; I am a Bainbridge. And whenever he came to this part of the country he stayed with us.

MISS VERNON.

I know you've always flattered yourself that there was something between them.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_With complete self-assurance._] And well I may, considering that I still have a lock of hair which he gave my grandmother.

MISS VERNON.

Half the families in the country have a greasy lock of hair which they tell you was the Regent's. Personally, I think it's rather snobbish to make a claim of that sort unless one's perfectly sure.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Bridling in her turn._] I think you're extremely rude, Helen. In the presence of a man I can't go into details, but I have proof of every word I say. You know what I mean, Louisa?

MISS HALL.

I believed the worst from the beginning, Mrs. Insoley.

MISS VERNON.

I have no doubt you firmly believe what you say, Mrs. Insoley; but if you don't mind my saying so, one has only to look at the portrait of Pamela Bainbridge to know the whole thing's absurd.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Frigidly._] We won't argue the point, Helen; I know I'm right, and there's an end of it.... Put the dog on that chair, Louisa.

MISS HALL.

That's Mr. Cobbett's chair, Mrs. Insoley.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Still a little out of temper._] Has Mr. Cobbett bought it?

COBBETT.

No, but Mr. Cobbett's been sitting in it.

MRS. INSOLEY.

And may no one use a chair that Mr. Cobbett has been sitting in?

COBBETT.

Certainly. But it so happens that Mr. Cobbett is just going to sit in it again.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_With a grim smile._] Mr. Cobbett has legs.

COBBETT.

Only two, and if a merciful Providence had intended him to stand on them it would undoubtedly have provided him with four.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Mr. Cobbett seems to be better acquainted with the designs of Providence than I should have expected.... Louisa, give me the dog. He shall sit on my lap.

COBBETT.

[_Chaffing her._] Ah, if you'd only told me that was the alternative, of course I wouldn't have hesitated for a moment.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I think you are very vulgar, sir.... I'm surprised that you should laugh at such an inane joke, Grace.

GRACE.

You forget that I have a naturally vulgar nature.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I try to, but you take great pains to remind me.

[CLAUDE _comes in with_ ARCHIBALD.

CLAUDE.

Well, did you enjoy your drive, mother?

MRS. INSOLEY.

I didn't go for my enjoyment, Claude; I went to exercise the horses.

ARCHIBALD.

We've been to a parish meeting.

CLAUDE.

[_Rather peevishly._] It's getting almost impossible to do anything for these Somersetshire people. They're such an obstinate, pig-headed lot.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I prophesied it forty years ago. When they first introduced all this nonsense about education, I said it was a serious matter.

ARCHIBALD.

[_With a twinkle in his eye._] Like all good prophets you apparently took care to be rather vague about it, mother.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Considering you weren't born I don't see what you can know about it, Archibald. I said this would happen. I said they would make the lower classes so independent that no one would be able to do anything with them. I went for a walk in the village this morning and nobody took any notice of me. Isn't that so, Louisa?

MISS HALL.

No, Mrs. Insoley.

MRS. INSOLEY.

What do you mean by no, Louisa?

MISS HALL.

[_Hastily._] I beg your pardon. I mean yes, Mrs. Insoley.

MRS. INSOLEY.

A few old men touched their hats, and one old woman curtsied, but that was all.

CLAUDE.

[_With a little nod._] Of course it's not important in itself, but it's the sign of a change. The long and short of it is that they don't look up to their betters as they used to.

GRACE.

[_Ironically._] Perhaps they've ceased to realise that we are their betters.

CLAUDE.

It's not too late to teach them their mistake. Personally I mean to be master in my own house.

GRACE.

[_Abruptly._] Peggy Gann came to see me this afternoon, Claude.

CLAUDE.

Did she?

[_There is a very short pause._ COBBETT _sees what is going to happen and gets up_.

COBBETT.

[_To_ EDITH LEWIS.] Wouldn't you like to come for a stroll in the garden?

EDITH LEWIS.

Yes.

GRACE.

I've asked her to fetch her father.

[COBBETT _and_ EDITH LEWIS _go out_.

CLAUDE.

[_Without waiting for the movement._] I'm sorry you did that, Grace.
I've got nothing to say to him.

GRACE.

[_To_ MRS. INSOLEY.] Do you know that Claude has threatened to dismiss Gann if Peggy hasn't gone by ten o'clock to-night?

MRS. INSOLEY.

For once in his life Claude has acted with spirit. He gave Gann twenty-four hours to think it over. My father would have given him fifteen minutes.

GRACE.

Why was it all kept from me? It seems that everybody knew but me.

CLAUDE.

Hang it all, Grace, I wanted to tell you last night and you wouldn't let me.

GRACE.

[_Startled._] Oh! Was it that? I didn't know.... Claude, I want you to be very kind and forgive that wretched girl. I want you to tell Gann that she needn't go.

CLAUDE.

[_Quite firmly._] My dear, I can't do that. I've made up my mind and I must stick to it.

GRACE.

Why?

CLAUDE.

Hang it all, what would happen to the discipline of the estate if I were always shilly-shallying? Every one in the place knows that when I say a thing I mean it. It's an enormous advantage to all concerned.

GRACE.

[_With a coaxing smile._] It wouldn't do any harm if you made an exception just this once.

CLAUDE.

It's a matter of upholding my authority. Gann refused to do what I told him, and I had to threaten him with immediate dismissal. I couldn't eat my words now without looking a perfect fool.

GRACE.

Don't you think it's awfully unjust to send a girl away because she's got into trouble?

CLAUDE.

It's a rule of the estate. I didn't make it.

GRACE.

[_Turning to_ MISS VERNON.] Helen, you're a woman. You must see how cruel it is. Can't _you_ say something to help me?

MISS VERNON.

I don't know what else one's to do. After all, we have the same rule at Foley.

CLAUDE.

They have it on half the large estates in the kingdom. It's absolutely essential if one has any regard for decency.

MISS VERNON.

I don't suppose it would be so common, and it certainly wouldn't have lasted so long, if there hadn't been some good in it.

GRACE.

[_Violently._] Oh, it's maddening. Always, always, there's that stone wall in front of me. Whatever is, is good. However cruel and unjust a custom is, no one must touch it because it's a custom. If a law is infamous, does it become any less infamous because people have suffered from it for a dozen generations?

MRS. INSOLEY.

Perhaps you're not very competent to judge matters of this sort, my

dear.

ARCHIBALD.

I'm afraid your sympathy is rather wasted in this particular case. Peggy Gann isn't a very deserving young woman.

GRACE.

If she were, there'd be no need for me to plead for her.

MRS. INSOLEY.

On those lines the more of a hussy a girl is the more she's deserving of sympathy.

GRACE.

[_To_ ARCHIBALD.] You had nothing against her till this happened.

ARCHIBALD.

Nothing very definite. She was always rather cheeky, and she never came to Sunday-school very regularly.

GRACE.

Is that all?

MRS. INSOLEY.

My own belief is that the Ganns are really Dissenters.

GRACE.

[_Impatiently._] Good heavens, they positively revel in going to church.

MRS. INSOLEY.

That may be or it may not. But they give _me_ the impression of chapel people.

ARCHIBALD.

Heaven knows, I don't want to seem hard and unsympathetic, but after all, you're not going to keep people moral if you pamper those who aren't.

GRACE.

And what d'you think'll happen to her if you make her leave here?

ARCHIBALD.

We'll do our best for her. It's not a pleasant position for any of us, Grace. I've been wretched about the whole thing, and I'm sure Claude has too.

CLAUDE.

Of course I have. But hang it all, in our position we can't afford to think of sentiment. Especially now that they're attacking us all round we've got to show them that we can keep a firm hand on the reins.

ARCHIBALD.

Do us the justice to see that we're really trying to do what's right. It may be very wrong that we should be in our particular positions, and we may be quite unworthy of them. But we didn't make society, and we're not responsible for its inequalities. We find ourselves in a certain station, and we have to act accordingly.

CLAUDE.

The long and the short of it is that it's our duty to look after those whom Providence has placed in our charge. And it's our duty to punish as well as to reward.

GRACE.

Oh, how hard you are! One would think you'd never done anything in your life that you regret. [_With increasing violence._] Oh, you virtuous people, I hate you. You're never content till you see the sinner actually frizzling. As if hell were needed when every sin brings its own punishment! And you never make excuses. You don't know how many temptations we resist for the one we fall to.

MISS VERNON.

Grace! What are you saying!

[GRACE, _almost beside herself, looks at her with haggard eyes. Suddenly she gives a start, and stares at_ MISS VERNON _with horror. She has realised that_ MISS VERNON _knows the relations that have existed between her and_ HENRY COBBETT. _There is a pause. The_ BUTLER _comes in_.]

MOORE.

Gann and his daughter are here, sir.

CLAUDE.

Oh, yes, I'll come at once.

MOORE.

Very good, sir.

[_He goes out._]

MRS. INSOLEY.

Why shouldn't he come here, Claude?

GRACE.

Yes, let him come by all means. And then you can see for yourselves.

ARCHIBALD.

I'll tell Moore, shall I? [_He goes to the door as he says this and calls._] Moore. Tell Gann to come here.

MISS VERNON.

[_Rising._] I think I'll leave you. This isn't any business of mine.
[_To_ MISS HALL.] Will you come with me?

MISS HALL.

Do you want me, Mrs. Insoley?

MRS. INSOLEY.

No. You've had no exercise to-day, Louisa. You'd better walk three times round the garden.

MISS HALL.

I'm not very well to-day, Mrs. Insoley.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Oh, nonsense! You're in the best of health. And you can take the dog with you.

MISS HALL.

Very well, Mrs. Insoley.

[MISS VERNON _and_ MISS HALL _go out_.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Louisa's very troublesome sometimes. She fancies she's not feeling well. But she's twenty-five years younger than I am, and I've never had a day's illness in my life.

[MOORE _opens the door for_ GANN, _who comes into the room, cap in hand, and stands at the door awkwardly. He is in his working clothes._

CLAUDE.

Good afternoon, Gann.

GANN.

Good afternoon, sir. Peggy said you wished to see me, sir.

GRACE.

I asked her to bring you here, Gann. I thought it would be better if you spoke to Mr. Insoley.

GANN.

I've got nothing to say to Mr. Insoley, ma'am.

CLAUDE.

I was hoping to find you in a more reasonable state of mind, Gann. You know, you can only hurt yourself by being pig-headed and stubborn.

GANN.

I didn't know as how I was, sir.

CLAUDE.

[_To_ GRACE.] You see, the man doesn't give me a chance.

GANN.

[_Making an effort on himself._] Please, Squire, I come to know if I'm really to go to-morrow? I know you said you'd send me away, Squire. But I couldn't bring myself to believe you meant it.

CLAUDE.

I'm willing to listen to anything you've got to say. I want to be quite fair to you.

GANN.

If I could only make you see as what you ask ain't possible, I'm sure you'd let us stay. There's nowhere Peggy _can_ go to.

CLAUDE.

Hang it all, Mrs. Insoley'll do all she can for her. You may be quite sure that Peggy shan't want for money.

GANN.

It isn't money the girl wants. If I send 'er away she'll just go to the bad altogether.

CLAUDE.

You see, it's a matter of principle, Gann. It would be devilish unjust to make an exception in your favour.

GANN.

[_Stepping forward with surly indignation and facing_ CLAUDE.] I love the girl and I can't bear to part with 'er. She's a good girl in her 'eart, only she's had a misfortune.

CLAUDE.

That's all very fine and large, Gann. But if she'd been a good girl, hang it all, she'd have had power to resist temptation.

GRACE.

[_Terrified._] Claude, you don't know what you're saying.

CLAUDE.

I don't want to rub it in and all that sort of thing, but my own feeling is that if she came rather a cropper, it was because she was--if you don't mind my saying so--because she was that way inclined. I don't think anyone can accuse me of being a hard man, but I'm afraid I haven't much pity for women who....

GRACE.

[_Interrupting._] Claude, don't go on--for God's sake.

GANN.

That's your last word, Squire? If the girl don't go, I must?

CLAUDE.

I'm afraid so.

GANN.

I've served you faithful, man and boy, for forty years. And I was born in that there cottage I live in now. If you turn us out where are we to go to? I'm getting on in years, and I shan't find it easy to get another job. It'll mean the work'us.

CLAUDE.

I'm very sorry. I can't do anything for you. You've had your chance and you've refused to take it.

[GANN _turns his cap round nervously. His face is distorted with agony. He opens his mouth to speak, but no words come, only an inarticulate groan. He turns on his heel._

CLAUDE.

In consideration of your long service I'll give you fifty pounds so that you can tide over the next few months.

GANN.

[_Violently._] You can keep your dirty money.

[_He goes out._ GRACE _goes up to_ CLAUDE _desperately_.

GRACE.

Oh, Claude, you can't do it. You'll break the man's heart. Haven't you any pity? Haven't you any forgiveness?

CLAUDE.

It's no good, Grace. I must stick to what I've said.

GRACE.

It's not often I've begged you to do anything for me.

CLAUDE.

Well, hang it all, this is the first time I've ever refused.

GRACE.

[_Bitterly._] I suppose because I've never asked you for anything before that wasn't absolutely trifling.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Why are you making such a point of it, Grace?

GRACE.

Is it very strange that I should feel sorry for anyone who's in distress?

CLAUDE.

I'll do anything in the world to please you, darling, but in this case you must trust to my better judgment.

GRACE.

How can you be so hard?

CLAUDE.

Come, Grace, don't be angry with me. It's bad enough as it is.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I have no patience with you, Claude. When your father made up his mind to do anything it was done, and it would never have occurred to me to oppose him.

ARCHIBALD.

[_With a twinkle in his eye._] You forget, mother, that was because you generally made up my father's mind some time before he did.

GRACE.

[_To_ MRS. INSOLEY _and_ ARCHIBALD.] Will you leave me alone with Claude. I must talk to him alone.

ARCHIBALD.

Come, mother. Let me take you for a stroll three times round the garden.

[MRS. INSOLEY _and_ ARCHIBALD _go out_.

GRACE.

I couldn't say it before them. They'd never understand. They'd only sneer. But can't you see, Claude, that it's out of the question to drive Gann away so callously? He loves the place just as much as you love it.... In my heart I seem to feel suddenly all that his shabby little cottage means to him--the woods and coverts and the meadows and the trees. His life is bound up with Kenyon. His roots are in the earth as if he were a growing thing. Can't you see what it must mean to him to leave it?

CLAUDE.

He only goes because he's headstrong and obstinate. He's the Somersetshire peasant all over. You do your best for them and you get no gratitude. You try to reason with them, but you can't get a single idea into their thick heads.

GRACE.

You can't punish him because he's stupid and dull. You're throwing him upon the world in his old age. It means starvation.

CLAUDE.

You must know that I'm only doing it because I think it's my duty.

GRACE.

[_Impatiently._] Oh, men always talk of their duty when they want to be odiously cruel.

CLAUDE.

Grace, how can you be so unkind to me?

GRACE.

Oh, Claude, if you love me at all, give in to me this time. You don't know what it means to me. I've often been horrible to you, but I'm going to be different. I want to love you. I want to be more to you than I've ever been. Claude, I implore you to do what I ask you--just because I ask it, because you love me.

CLAUDE.

[_Withdrawing himself a little._] I could not love you, dear, so much, loved I not honour....

GRACE.

[_Interrupting passionately._] Oh, no, don't, Claude; for God's sake be sincere and natural. Can't you forget that you're a landed proprietor and a J.P. and all the rest of it, and remember that you're only a man, as weak and as--as frail as the rest of us? You hope to be forgiven yourself, and you're utterly pitiless.

CLAUDE.

My darling, it's just as much for your sake that I'm firm.

GRACE.

[_Impatiently._] Oh, how can you make phrases! What on earth have I got to do with it?

CLAUDE.

Hang it all, don't you see that it's because of you that I can't give way? It's beastly having to say it. It makes me feel such an ass.

GRACE.

[_Beginning to be frightened._] What have I got to do with it?

CLAUDE.

Until I knew you I don't suppose I had a higher opinion of women than most men, but you taught me what a--what a stunning fine thing a good woman is.

GRACE.

[_Hoarsely._] It's perfectly absurd. It's--it's unreasonable. I've not been.... Only the other day you said I was cold. And just now you told me I was unkind.

CLAUDE.

I dare say that's all my fault. I expect I bore you sometimes. After all, I know you're worth about six of me. I can't expect you to love me as I love you.

GRACE.

D'you mean to say that if I weren't--what you think me, you wouldn't insist on that poor girl going away?

CLAUDE.

I don't suppose I should feel quite the same about it.

GRACE.

[_Trying to keep back her sobs._] It's so unreasonable.

CLAUDE.

Even if it weren't for the rule of the estate, I couldn't let her live in the same place as you. I can't help it. It's just a sort of instinct. It simply disgusts me to think that you may meet that--that woman when you walk about, and her kid.

GRACE.

Oh, Claude, you don't know what you're saying.

CLAUDE.

When I heard she'd been here and you'd been talking to her, I felt almost sick.

GRACE.

[_Breaking down._] Oh, I can't bear it.

CLAUDE.

Come, darling, don't let's quarrel any more. It hurts me so awfully.

GRACE.

[_To herself._] Oh, I can't. I can't.

CLAUDE.

Say you forgive me, darling.

GRACE.

IP... If I weren't what you.... Oh, it's too much to ask anyone. Claude, I beseech you to give way.

[_He shakes his head. She falls back in despair, realising that there is no way to move him._]

GRACE.

Oh, what a punishment!

[_The sound of a gong is heard._ CLAUDE _looks at his watch_.

CLAUDE.

By Jove, I had no idea it was so late. There's the dressing gong. You must hurry up.

GRACE.

[_Looking at him vaguely._] What is it?

CLAUDE.

Time to dress for dinner, darling. You won't be late, will you? You know how mother hates to be kept waiting.

GRACE.

[_Dully._] No, I won't be late.

[_He takes her hand and presses it, then hurries out. She has given him her hand inertly, and it falls heavily to her side as he drops it. She remains standing where he left her. She tries to stifle the tearless sobs that seem to choke her. The_ BUTLER _comes in_.

MOORE.

Peggy Gann wishes to know if you want to see her again, madam.

GRACE.

[_With a start._] Has she been waiting all this time?

MOORE.

Yes'm. She didn't know as Gann had left. He never come back to the servants' hall.

GRACE.

Tell her to come here.

MOORE.

Very good, madam.

[_He goes out. In a moment he opens the door for_ PEGGY GANN.

GRACE.

Oh, Peggy, how ill you look! I've been able to do nothing for you.

PEGGY.

[_With a cry of distress._] Oh, mum, I was hoping. You said you'd do your best for me.

GRACE.

My dear, I'm so dreadfully sorry for you.

PEGGY.

It's so 'ard on me, mum, and so 'ard on father. Wasn't there something more you could do, mum?

GRACE.

[_With a little gasp of anguish._] I did all I could. I couldn't do anything more. I couldn't really.... [_Almost to herself._] It's too much to ask anyone.

PEGGY.

I've got to go then, and there's an end of it. You won't let father be turned away, will you, mum? That's all I care about now. It 'ud just break his 'eart.

GRACE.

[_With a ray of hope._] D'you think he'll let you go? I think it's the best thing after all, Peggy. I've done--I've done all I could.

PEGGY.

No, he won't hear of it. But I shall go all the same--somewhere he can't find me.

GRACE.

[_Anxious now to make the best of it._] I dare say it won't be for very long, Peggy. Have you as much money as you want? I should like to do something for you.

PEGGY.

I shan't want anything, thank you, mum. And thank you for all you've done. And if anything come to 'appen to me, you'd see as the baby wasn't

sent to the workhouse, wouldn't you, mum?

GRACE.

How d'you mean? I don't understand.

PEGGY.

I'm not going to take the baby with me, mum. It would only be a hindrance.

GRACE.

[_With a sigh of relief._] Oh, I was so afraid you meant....

PEGGY.

Is there anything else you want me for, mum?

GRACE.

No, Peggy.

PEGGY.

Then I'll say good evening, mum.

GRACE.

Good evening, Peggy.

[_She watches_ PEGGY _go out, then she gives a little moan of despair_.

GRACE.

No, I couldn't, I couldn't.

EDITH LEWIS _comes in gaily_.

EDITH LEWIS.

There you are! I thought you were in your room. Your maid said you hadn't come up yet.

GRACE.

[_Wearily._] I was just going.

EDITH LEWIS.

[_With a smile._] I've got something dreadfully important to ask you.

GRACE.

[_Forcing a smile._] What is it?

EDITH LEWIS.

Well, I want to know if you're going to wear the grey satin you wore on Saturday. You see, I only brought three dinner dresses down with me, and one of them's a grey, only it's much more slaty than yours, and it'll look so cold beside it. So I shan't put it on if you're going to wear yours.

GRACE.

[_Dully._] No, I won't wear my grey satin.

EDITH LEWIS.

What are you going to wear?

GRACE.

I don't know.

EDITH LEWIS.

But you must know.

GRACE.

Does it matter?

EDITH LEWIS.

I don't want to clash with you.

GRACE.

[_Clenching her hands to prevent herself from screaming._] I won't put on anything that'll interfere with your grey.

EDITH LEWIS.

Thank you. Now I can be quite happy. I say, we shall be so late.

[_She runs off._ GRACE _gives a little answering laugh to hers; and as_ EDITH LEWIS _goes out, it lengthens into a mirthless, low,

hysterical peal, broken with sobs_.

END OF THE SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

[_The dining-room at Kenyon Fulton. It is a fine room with French windows leading into the garden. On the walls are departed Insoleys of the last two or three generations, stiff ladies and gentlemen of the Victorian era, military-looking fellows in the uniform of the early nineteenth century, and ungainly Georgian squires with their wives in powdered hair. Between the windows, standing well away from the wall, rather far back, is a round table laid out for breakfast. On the Sheraton sideboard is a cloth, a stand for keeping dishes warm, a large ham, and plates and forks and spoons. Against the wall opposite the sideboard are a row of chairs, and there are half a dozen chairs round the table. There are doors right and left._

It is the morning after the events which occur in the Second Act, and when the curtain rises prayers have just finished. CLAUDE _is seated at the table with an immense prayer-book and a still larger Bible in front of him. The rest of the party are rising to their feet. They have been kneeling against various chairs. They consist of _MRS. INSOLEY, MISS HALL, _and_ MISS VERNON. _Well away from them, emphasising the fact that even the Almighty must recognise the difference between the gentry and their inferiors, have been praying the servants. They have been kneeling against the row of chairs that line the wall, according to their precedence, ranging from the _COOK _at one end to the _BUTLER _at the other; and they consist of the _COOK, _obese, elderly and respectable_, MRS. INSOLEY'S MAID, _two_ HOUSEMAIDS, _the_ KITCHENMAID, _the_ FOOTMAN, _and_ MOORE _the butler. When they have scrambled to their feet they pause for a moment to gather themselves together, and, headed by the _COOK, _walk out. The _BUTLER _takes the Bible and the prayer-book off the table and carries them away_. CLAUDE _gets up. He takes up his letters and the _Times, _which he puts under his arm_.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I didn't see Grace's maid, Claude.

CLAUDE.

I dare say Grace couldn't spare her.

MRS. INSOLEY.

If Grace were more punctual she wouldn't be obliged to deprive her maid of the pleasure and the duty of attending morning prayers.

MISS HALL.

I didn't see your maid either, Miss Vernon.

MISS VERNON.

She's a Roman Catholic.

MRS. INSOLEY.

A Papist, Helen? Isn't that very risky?

MISS VERNON.

Good gracious me, why?

MRS. INSOLEY.

Aren't you afraid she'll corrupt the other servants?

MISS VERNON.

[_With a smile._] She's a highly respectable person of well over forty.

MRS. INSOLEY.

She must be very flighty. I would as soon have an atheist.

MISS HALL.

I would never dream of having a Romish maid myself.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Is there any likelihood of your having a maid at all, Louisa?

MISS HALL.

No, Mrs. Insoley.

MRS. INSOLEY.

In that case I can't quite see what is the use of your having an opinion on the subject.

CLAUDE.

[_Looking up from his letters, with a smile._] Miss Hall was only making a general reflection.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I don't like general reflections at the breakfast table.

[_During the next few speeches the_ BUTLER _and the_ FOOTMAN _come in with covered entrée dishes which they put on the sideboard, coffee and milk in silver pots, and tea. They go out._ CLAUDE _retires to the window to read his letters_.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I suppose you have prayers at Foley, Helen?

MISS VERNON.

I'm afraid I don't. It makes me feel rather shy to read them.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I don't see why it should. It doesn't make me feel shy.

MISS HALL.

You read them so well, Mrs. Insoley.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I never forget while I'm reading them that I'm a woman of birth and a woman of property.

MISS VERNON.

And then I always think the servants hate them.

MRS. INSOLEY.

The more they hate them, the better it is for them. That is life, my dear Helen. It's a very good thing to begin the day by making it distinctly understood that masters are masters and servants are servants.

MISS HALL.

And I think servants like that, Mrs. Insoley.

MRS. INSOLEY.

It is not a matter of interest to me if they like it or not, Louisa. I have the authority of my maker for it, and that is quite enough for me.

CENTER

HENRY COBBETT _comes in_.

COBBETT.

I'm sorry I'm late.

MRS. INSOLEY.

When breakfast's at ten o'clock I cannot imagine why people shouldn't be punctual.

COBBETT.

Neither can I. [_Going to the sideboard._] Let's have a look at the food.

MRS. INSOLEY.

See if there's anything I'd like, Louisa.

COBBETT.

[_Taking off the covers._] There's fried sole--eggs and bacon.

MRS. INSOLEY.

The staple of every middle-class hotel in the kingdom.

COBBETT.

And devilled kidneys.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I'll begin with fried sole, and then I'll have eggs and bacon, Louisa.

CLAUDE.

[_Coming forward._] Oh, I'm sorry. Is there anything I can get you?

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Chaffing her fellow-guest._] And then, if Mr. Cobbett has left any,

perhaps I'll see if I can eat a devilled kidney.

COBBETT.

[_With a chuckle._] Mr. Cobbett thinks he'll have to look nippy to get anything at all.

CLAUDE.

[_To_ MISS VERNON.] I wonder what I can tempt you with?

MISS VERNON.

I think I'll have some fried sole.

CLAUDE.

That's the beauty of the country. One does relish one's breakfast, doesn't one?

[_He hands a plate to_ MISS VERNON, _and sits down with another for himself. As he does this he takes the_ Times _from under his arm and sits on it_.

MISS VERNON.

[_With a smile at his peculiarity._] Is there anything in the _Times_, Claude?

CLAUDE.

I haven't read it yet.

MRS. INSOLEY.

In some ways you're much more of a Bainbridge than an Insoley, Claude. My father used always to sit on the _Times_ so that no one should read it before him.

CLAUDE.

I must say I don't like to have my paper messed about by a lot of people before I've had a chance of looking at it. Half the pleasure of reading the _Times_ is reading it first. Besides, the _Morning Post_ and the _Mail_ are on the sideboard for anyone who wants them.

EDITH LEWIS _comes in_.

EDITH.

Oh, I know I'm dreadfully late. Everybody's going to scold me. And I'm so sorry.

COBBETT.

[_Imitating_ MRS. INSOLEY.] When breakfast's at ten o'clock I cannot imagine why people shouldn't be punctual.

EDITH.

[_Smiling._] Isn't Grace down yet? [_To_ CLAUDE, _who rises to give her something to eat_.] No, don't bother. I'll help myself.

MRS. INSOLEY.

When I was mistress of this house breakfast was served punctually at eight o'clock every morning.

COBBETT.

[_Flippantly._] It must have seemed just like supper. Did you have it the last thing before going to bed?

MRS. INSOLEY.

I made no exceptions. The day after my cousin James broke his neck in the hunting-field and was brought to this very house on a stretcher, I came down as the clock struck. And a very hearty breakfast I ate too.

COBBETT.

Perhaps he didn't leave you anything.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_With a chuckle._] On the contrary, he left me all his debts.

CENTER

Enter GRACE.

GRACE.

Good morning.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Good afternoon, Grace.

GRACE.

Am I late? I think punctuality's the most detestable of all the virtues.

MRS. INSOLEY.

It's a royal virtue, my dear.

GRACE.

In that case, as a member of the middle classes, it's not surprising that I don't practise it.

CLAUDE.

What can I get you, darling?

GRACE.

Is there anything nice to eat?

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_With a grim smile._] That is a matter of opinion.

CLAUDE.

There's fried sole and eggs and bacon.

GRACE.

Oh, I don't think I'll have anything. I'll just have some tea and toast.

CLAUDE.

My dear, you're not off your feed, are you?

MRS. INSOLEY.

Grace has probably been stuffing herself with bread and butter in her room. I have no patience with the new-fangled custom of giving people tea when they wake up. I never give it to my guests.

COBBETT.

Then don't ask me to come and stay with you.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Delighted with the opportunity he has given her._] It may surprise you, but I have no intention of doing so.

COBBETT.

[_Cheerfully._] There now. And I thought I'd made such an impression on you, Mrs. Insoley.

MRS. INSOLEY.

That's why I couldn't risk asking you to stay with me. Perhaps at my age I am safe from your blandishments, but Louisa is extremely susceptible.

MISS HALL.

Oh, Mrs. Insoley, how can you! Why, Mr. Cobbett must be ten years younger than I am.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I should put it at fifteen.

COBBETT.

Don't dash my hopes to the ground, Miss Hall. I was flattering myself you didn't look upon me altogether with indifference.

[ARCHIBALD INSOLEY _comes in from the garden_.

ARCHIBALD.

Ah, I thought I'd find you still at breakfast.

CLAUDE.

We're a lazy lot. I suppose you've been up and about for the last two hours.

GRACE.

[_Looking at him._] Is anything the matter?

ARCHIBALD.

Yes.

CLAUDE.

I thought you looked a bit odd.

ARCHIBALD.

A most awful thing has happened. I've only just heard of it.

CLAUDE.

[_Getting up from his chair._] What is it, old man?

[_By this time the breakfasters are disturbed; there is a certain embarrassment about them; they are suffering from the awkwardness people feel when they see some one in a condition of distress, but do not suppose it has anything to do with themselves._]

ARCHIBALD.

You'd better come along with me to the smoking-room.

GRACE.

It's too late to make a secret of it, Archibald. You'd better tell us all.

CLAUDE.

Fire away, old man.

ARCHIBALD.

[_After a moment's hesitation._] Peggy Gann has killed herself.

[GRACE _springs to her feet with a cry_.

CLAUDE.

[_Looking at_ GRACE.] My God.

[GRACE _comes forward, horror on her face, and walks unsteadily to a chair. She sinks into it and stares in front of her._]

CLAUDE.

Why on earth did she do it?

GRACE.

How horrible!

CLAUDE.

[_Going up to her, about to put his hand on her shoulder._] Grace.

GRACE.

[_With a shiver._] Don't touch me.

[_He stops and looks at her, puzzled and unhappy._

ARCHIBALD.

You'd better come along.

CLAUDE.

[_With his eyes on_ GRACE.] I feel I ought to do something. I don't know what to do.

ARCHIBALD.

I'm afraid there's nothing much that can be done.

CLAUDE.

I'd better go and see Gann, hadn't I?

MRS. INSOLEY.

Won't you finish your breakfast before you go, Claude?

CLAUDE.

Oh, I can't eat anything more.

[_He goes out with_ ARCHIBALD.

MISS HALL.

What a dreadful thing.

[GRACE _gets up and goes to the window_.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Where are you going, Grace?

GRACE.

[_Almost beside herself._] For heaven's sake, leave me alone.

[_She stands with her back to the rest of the party, looking out of the window. There is a little awkward pause._

MRS. INSOLEY.

Louisa, get me some of those devilled kidneys that Mr. Cobbett has been making so much fuss about.

COBBETT.

Let me.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Louisa will get them. She likes to wait on me herself. Don't you, Louisa?

MISS HALL.

Yes, Mrs. Insoley.

[MISS VERNON _pushes back her chair_.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Have you finished, Helen?

MISS VERNON.

Yes.

MRS. INSOLEY.

You've eaten nothing.

MISS VERNON.

I couldn't.

[MISS VERNON _looks as if she were going to speak to_ GRACE, _but she changes her mind and merely sits down in another chair. Every now and then she looks up at_ GRACE.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I cannot imagine why anyone should be upset because an abandoned hussy has been so wicked as to destroy herself.

COBBETT.

Well, it hasn't taken my appetite away, at all events.

MRS. INSOLEY.

If we were honest with ourselves, Mr. Cobbett, we should acknowledge that nobody's death is important enough to interfere with one's appetite.

MISS HALL.

Oh, Mrs. Insoley, how can you say such a thing?

MRS. INSOLEY.

Louisa, I've been like a mother to you for ten years. Would you eat one potato less for your dinner if I were found dead in my bed to-morrow morning?

MISS HALL.

[_Taking out her handkerchief._] Oh, yes, Mrs. Insoley. I really, really would.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Touched._] You are a good girl, Louisa, and you may have that black lace shawl of mine. If you mend it carefully, it'll last you for years.

MISS HALL.

Oh, thank you, Mrs. Insoley. You are so kind to me.

EDITH.

D'you think I ought to offer to go away to-day? I was going to stay till to-morrow.

COBBETT.

I was going to-day in any case. I'm due to stay with some people in Wiltshire.

MRS. INSOLEY.

You seem to be in great demand.

COBBETT.

I have a very pleasant fund of small talk.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I'm afraid this is not an occasion upon which you'll find it of any use.

[_There is a moment's pause._

EDITH.

I'm going into the garden.

COBBETT.

Come on. I'm dying for a smoke.

[_She gets up and walks out through the French windows._ COBBETT
follows her.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Getting up from the table._] I think you should remember, my dear Grace, that suicide is not only very wicked, but very cowardly. I have no patience with the sentimentalities of the present day. Our fathers buried people who were sinful enough to destroy themselves at the cross-roads with a stake in their insides. And it served them right.

[GRACE _does not answer_. MRS. INSOLEY, _with a shrug of the shoulders, walks out of the room, followed by_ MISS HALL. _As soon as_ GRACE _hears the door shut she turns round with an exclamation, half-smothered, of impatient anger_.

GRACE.

Oh, did you hear? They have the heart to chatter like that when that unhappy girl is lying dead. They haven't a word of pity. It seems to mean nothing to them that she sacrificed herself. If she died, it was to save her father, so that he shouldn't be thrown out of work in his old age. And they call her wicked and sinful.

MISS VERNON.

But is that anything new to you? Haven't you noticed that people always rather resent the heroism of others? They don't like the claim it makes on _them_, and the easiest way to defend themselves is with a sneer.

GRACE.

I might have saved her life if I'd chosen, but I hadn't the courage.

MISS VERNON.

[_Afraid that she is going to blurt out a secret which had much better not be referred to._] Grace, don't be stupid.

GRACE.

Once I suspected what she was going to do, but she was too clever for me. I so wanted to believe it was all right. I wanted her to go away quietly.

MISS VERNON.

[_Trying to calm her._] Lots of women have been in difficulties before, and they haven't killed themselves. There must have been some kink in her nature. I suppose the instinct of life wasn't so strong as it is with most of us, and--and she would have committed suicide for almost any reason.

GRACE.

There was only one thing to say, and I didn't say it. I couldn't.

MISS VERNON.

My dear, for heaven's sake pull yourself together.

GRACE.

D'you know why Claude was so determined she should go? Because he couldn't bear that _I_ should come in contact with a woman who'd done wrong.

MISS VERNON.

[_Looking down._] I had an idea that was at the back of his mind.

GRACE.

[_With sudden suspicion._] Why should you know what Claude feels better than I do?

MISS VERNON.

[_Fearing she has given herself away._] It was a mere guess on my part.

GRACE.

[_With a keen look at her._] When I asked you the other day whether you'd been very much in love with Claude, you wouldn't answer.

MISS VERNON.

[_Smiling._] I really thought it was no business of yours.

GRACE.

[_Gravely._] Are you in love with him still?

[MISS VERNON _is about to break out indignantly, but quickly controls herself_.

MISS VERNON.

Yes, I suppose I am.

GRACE.

Much?

MISS VERNON.

Hoarsely.] Yes.

[_There is a pause._

GRACE.

D'you know that my mother-in-law would give half her fortune to know--what you know? She's been on the look-out to trip me up for years. It only wants a hint, and she can be trusted to make the most of it.

MISS VERNON.

My dear, I haven't a notion what you're talking about.

GRACE.

[_With a shrug of the shoulders._] How did you find out?

[MISS VERNON _looks at her for a moment, then looks away in embarrassment_.

MISS VERNON.

I suspected before. In those circumstances hardly any men seem able to help a sort of proprietary air. He rather gave it away, you know.... And then yesterday I felt quite certain.

GRACE.

I'm in your hands. What are you going to do?

MISS VERNON.

My dear, what can I do? Claude wouldn't love me more because he loved

you less.

GRACE.

You must utterly despise me.

MISS VERNON.

No.... I feel awfully sorry for Claude.

GRACE.

[_Almost jealously._] Claude's your first thought always.

MISS VERNON.

He's been the whole world to me since I was a girl of sixteen.

GRACE.

Is that why you never married?

MISS VERNON.

I suppose it is.

GRACE.

I never dreamt that anyone could care for Claude like that. I suppose you see something in him that I've never seen.... He has a hundred different ways of getting on my nerves.

MISS VERNON.

You see, I'm not irritated by the mannerisms that irritate you.

GRACE.

[_Reflectively._] Real love accepts them, I suppose.

MISS VERNON.

It wants them even because it's something individual to cling to.... And then it laughs at them a little, and the best love of all includes a sense of humour.

GRACE.

It's made me feel so strange to know that you love him, Helen. It's given him something that he's never had before.

MISS VERNON.

I don't suppose any woman likes her husband less because she knows that another woman is eating her heart out for him.

GRACE.

[_Slowly._] I wonder if I've misjudged him all these years.... D'you think I found him shallow because there was no depth in me, and narrow because I was narrow myself.

[_Enter_ CLAUDE INSOLEY. GRACE _turns to him quickly_.

GRACE.

Did you see Gann?

CLAUDE.

[_Touching the bell._] No, he wasn't at the cottage. I've sent for him and told him to come here.

GRACE.

They know where he is then?

CLAUDE.

Yes, worse luck. He's been soaking at the public-house since it opened.

MISS VERNON.

But when did it happen?

CLAUDE.

Peggy, d'you mean? She did it last night.

GRACE.

Last night? But why have we only just heard of it?

CLAUDE.

[_Deeply discouraged._] Because they don't come to us any more when they're in trouble. They keep it to themselves.

[MOORE _answers the bell_.

CLAUDE.

Oh, Moore, when Gann comes let me know. I'll come and see him at once.

MOORE.

He's here now, sir.

CLAUDE.

Is he? I didn't expect him yet. All right.

GRACE.

Won't you let him come here, Claude? I should like to speak to him too.

CLAUDE.

I don't think you'd better see him if he's been drinking. He may be going to make himself rather objectionable.

GRACE.

I must say to him what I've got on my heart, Claude.

CLAUDE.

Very well. [_To_ MOORE.] Tell Gann to come here.

MOORE.

Very good, sir.

[_Exit._]

MISS VERNON.

I dare say you'd like me to leave you.

GRACE.

You don't mind, do you?

[_With a shake of the head and a smile_ MISS VERNON _goes out_.]

CLAUDE _looks a little uncertainly at his wife. He seeks for something to say._

CLAUDE.

What a nice woman that is! I can't imagine why Archibald doesn't hurry

up and marry her.

GRACE.

Perhaps he's not in love with her.

CLAUDE.

Any man in his senses would be in love with her.

[GRACE _does not answer, but she gives him a curious glance_. MOORE _opens the door to show_ GANN _in_. GANN _is dishevelled and untidy, his face haggard and drawn. He is not exactly drunk, but he is stupefied, partly with liquor and partly with grief. He carries his gun. He comes in, his cap on his head, and stands clumsily near the door._

CLAUDE.

Take off your cap, Gann.

[GANN _looks at him unsteadily and slowly takes off his cap_.

GANN.

Did you want to speak to me, Squire?

CLAUDE.

I've just been round to your cottage, Gann. I saw Peggy.... I want to tell you how awfully sorry I am for what's happened. I can never forgive myself.

[GANN _steps forward with a lurch and faces_ CLAUDE.

GANN.

What d'you want me for? Couldn't you let me be? D'you still want me to go?

CLAUDE.

No. That's what I wanted to tell you.

GANN.

Give us time and we'll clear. We don't want long. Give us time to bury the girl. That's all we want.

[GRACE _gives an exclamation of horror_.

CLAUDE.

I hope you'll stay. I want to do everything I can to make up for your loss. I want you to know that I blame myself most awfully.

GANN.

Will that bring 'er back to life, d'you think?

CLAUDE.

I'd give anything for this horrible accident not to have happened.
[_With a look at Grace._] I'm afraid it's my fault.

GANN.

She killed 'erself so as I shouldn't be turned off. That's why she killed 'erself. You're a hard master--you always was. She thought it was the only way to save me from the work'us.

CLAUDE.

[_Very awkwardly._] In future I'll try to be different. I didn't think I was hard. I thought I was only just.

GRACE.

It was a cruel rule.

CLAUDE.

I thought I was only doing my duty.

GANN.

She was a good girl, after all, Squire, a good girl.

CLAUDE.

I'm sure she was.

GANN.

It's easy enough for you people to keep straight. You don't 'ave temptations like we 'ave.

CLAUDE.

No, that's true enough. I suppose it's not really very hard for us to be

moderately decent.

GRACE.

[_In a choking voice._] Where is the child now, Gann?

GANN.

[_Violently._] D'you want that too? Ain't you satisfied yet? Has the child got to go before I stay?

GRACE.

No, no. I only wanted to know if there was anything I could do. I wanted to help you.

GANN.

I don't want your 'elp. I only want you to let me work and earn my wages.

CLAUDE.

That you shall do, I promise you.

GANN.

Can I go now? I've got a deal to do this morning.

CLAUDE.

Yes.... Will you shake hands with me before you go?

GANN.

What good'll that do you?

[CLAUDE _gives a gesture of discouragement_.

CLAUDE.

I can only repeat that I'm most awfully sorry. I'm afraid there's absolutely nothing I can do to make up for your great loss.... You can go now.

[GANN _turns to go, while_ CLAUDE _and_ GRACE _watch him silently. Suddenly he comes back and thrusts his gun into_ CLAUDE'S _hand_.

GANN.

Look 'ere, Squire, you take my gun. I ain't fit to keep it.

CLAUDE.

[_Sharply._] What the devil d'you mean?

GANN.

Last night when the liquor was in me I swore I'd blow your brains out and swing for it. Don't let me 'ave the gun. I'm not fit to keep it yet. If I get on the drink again I'll kill you.

CLAUDE.

What the dickens d'you mean by speaking to me like that! Of course you must have your gun. I can't allow you to neglect your work.

GRACE.

[_Almost in a whisper._] Claude, take care.

CLAUDE.

[_Looking at the lock._] Why isn't it loaded?

GANN.

They took the cartridges out. I was about mad, and I don't know what I said. If I'd come across you then--you wouldn't be standing where you are now.

CLAUDE.

I suppose you take eights?

[GRACE _and_ GANN _both look at him_. GRACE _gives a start when she realises what he is going to do_.

GANN.

That's right.

[CLAUDE _nods and goes to the door. He hesitates, with a look at_
GRACE.

GRACE.

I shall be all right.

[_He goes out. In a moment he comes back with two cartridges. He

puts them in the gun, and hands it back to the gamekeeper._

CLAUDE.

Here you are. I don't think I'm afraid. I'll take my chance of your wanting to shoot me.

[GANN _takes the gun, and his hands close round it convulsively. He half raises it._ CLAUDE _goes to the door through which he has just come, and closes it. Then, almost mastered by the temptation_, GANN _pulls himself together and advances a step towards his master_. GRACE _gives a stifled cry_. CLAUDE _turns round and faces the man_.

CLAUDE.

That'll do, Gann. I don't think I have anything more to say to you. You can go.

[GANN _struggles to command himself. His fingers itch to shoot, but_ CLAUDE'S _unconcern prevents him_.

GANN.

By God!

[_He turns round to go, and flings the gun violently from him._

CLAUDE.

[_Peremptorily._] Gann, take your gun.

[_The man stops, looks at his master, and then, cowed, picks it up. He lurches heavily out of the room. There is a pause._ GRACE _draws a long breath_.

GRACE.

I'm glad you did that, Claude.

CLAUDE.

[_Thinking she refers to his attempts at apology._] It was very difficult to know what to say to him.

GRACE.

I didn't mean that. I meant, I'm glad you made him take the gun.

CLAUDE.

Oh! Hang it all, you didn't think I was likely to be frightened of one of my own servants, did you?

GRACE.

[_In a low voice._] I was rather afraid he was going to shoot you.

CLAUDE.

So was I. But I felt pretty sure he saw two of me, and I thought he'd probably shoot at the wrong one.

GRACE.

You're very plucky.

CLAUDE.

Rot! [_He hesitates for a moment._] Grace, I'm afraid you think I've been an awful skunk.

GRACE.

[_With a quick look at him._] We none of us knew anything like this was going to happen.

CLAUDE.

Will you forgive me?

GRACE.

[_Startled._] I?

CLAUDE.

I've been feeling such an awful cad. If I'd only done what you wanted me to, this wouldn't have happened.

GRACE.

That's not _your_ fault. I didn't say--what I should have said to make you change your mind.

CLAUDE.

It rather put my back up that you should be so set on letting Peggy stay. But it struck me afterwards, of course you couldn't feel the same about it as I did. I think if one's awfully straight, one's full of

charity, don't you know.

GRACE.

My dear Claude, you talk as if I were a girl of eighteen.

CLAUDE.

I don't suppose you remember, but when Archibald told us, I wanted to say something to you....

GRACE.

Yes, your first thought was for me, wasn't it?

CLAUDE.

[_Going on._] And I came near you. And--and you sort of shuddered, and said: "For God's sake, don't touch me!"

GRACE.

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be unkind.

CLAUDE.

No, I know you didn't. It just came out unawares. And--oh, Grace, I couldn't bear to think you--you couldn't stick me, don't you know.... I suppose I'm a damned fool, but I haven't made you hate and loathe me, have I?

GRACE.

I'm not worth so much troubling about, Claude.

CLAUDE.

I can't help it. You've just somehow got in my blood and bones, and if it didn't sound such drivel, I'd say you meant everything in the world to me. Only you just laugh at me when I say things like that.

GRACE.

[_Explaining to herself rather than to him._] It's very hard for all of us to say what we mean. The words we use are so frayed. One ought to guess at--at the soul within them.

CLAUDE.

I've been trying to think about Gann and his daughter, but I can't

really think of anything but you.

GRACE.

You know, Claude, no one's so wonderful as you think me. I'm no longer so young as all that, and you're the only person who ever thought me very pretty.

CLAUDE.

I don't mind. Sometimes, so that my love should mean more to you, don't you know, I've wanted you to get older quickly, and I've wanted you to be plain.

GRACE.

[_With a little hysterical laugh._] Oh, my dear, what a horrible prospect.

CLAUDE.

Don't laugh at me now, Grace.

GRACE.

[_With tears in her voice._] I'm not laughing at you. God knows I'm not laughing at you.

CLAUDE.

I'm such an ass at explaining myself. What I want to make you understand is that I don't love you for anything that other people could love you for. I love you because you're you, don't you know. Because you're so awfully good and straight. And you know I respect you so awfully.

GRACE.

[_In a hoarse voice._] I'm not good, Claude.

CLAUDE.

If I didn't believe it, I should think the world a pretty rotten place.

GRACE.

I haven't been the sort of wife you wanted. I felt that always.

CLAUDE.

You've been the only woman in the world for me. Always.

GRACE.

[_Deeply moved._] Not many women can say that, can they? One ought to be very grateful.

CLAUDE.

D'you remember the first time I ever saw you?

GRACE.

[_Looking away from him._] I wonder you didn't marry Helen Vernon years before you came across me.

CLAUDE.

Hang it all, why on earth should I have done that!

GRACE.

Your mother was very anxious that you should.

CLAUDE.

I was just as little in love with Helen Vernon as she was in love with me.

GRACE.

I can't help seeing that she would have made you a much better wife than I have. She would have understood you. I don't think I ever understood you. I've been a wretched failure, Claude.

CLAUDE.

Darling, how can you talk such rot?

GRACE.

She might have had children. You wanted them so much, Claude, and I haven't given you any.

CLAUDE.

That's been hard luck on both of us, darling.

GRACE.

[_With deep feeling._] It might have made all the difference.

CLAUDE.

If I wanted children it was chiefly because I thought you'd be happier. You wouldn't have minded the dull life down here then. And you might have cared a bit more for me because I was their father.

GRACE.

It all comes back to me, doesn't it? I'm in all your thoughts always.

CLAUDE.

D'you mind?

GRACE.

I'm so ashamed.

[ARCHIBALD _comes in from the hall_.

ARCHIBALD.

Oh, Claude, I met the coroner's officer on my way along here. He wants to see you.

CLAUDE.

All right. I'll come. Is he in the hall?

ARCHIBALD.

[_With a nod._] I told him you knew nothing more than I'd said. But I'm afraid they'll call you at the inquest.

CLAUDE.

The only thing's to grin and bear it.

[_They go out._ GRACE _sinks into a chair at the writing-table and buries her face in her hands. In a moment_ HENRY COBBETT _enters. She starts up when she hears his footstep on the gravel. He has his hat in his hand and his coat over his arm._

COBBETT.

I'm just starting. I was looking for you to say good-bye.

GRACE.

Is it time for you to go already? I didn't know it was late.

COBBETT.

Thanks awfully for putting me up. It's been perfectly topping.

GRACE.

It was nice of you to come. I hope you'll run down again one of these days.

COBBETT.

[_In a lower tone._] I suppose you never want to set eyes on me again.

GRACE.

Never.

COBBETT.

You're not awfully unhappy, are you?

GRACE.

[_With something between a sob and a chuckle._] Awfully.

COBBETT.

I'm dreadfully sorry.

GRACE.

That doesn't do me much good, does it?

COBBETT.

If there's anything I can do, I'd like awfully to do it if you'd let me.

GRACE.

No, whatever happens no one can help me but myself.

COBBETT.

I shouldn't have played the fool if I'd thought you were going to take things so much to heart.

GRACE.

[_Ironically._] That's the nuisance of women, isn't it? They _will_ make an affair of what's really only an episode.

COBBETT.

You have a way of saying things that makes one feel an awful bounder. After all, one can't help falling in love, and one's not a blackguard because one falls out of it.

GRACE.

D'you remember asking me yesterday if I was beginning to care for Claude differently?

COBBETT.

Yes.

GRACE.

I love him as I never thought it was possible to love. I don't know why I love him. It's come to me suddenly. I--oh, I can't tell you what it is. It's like hunger in my soul. And I'm frightened.

COBBETT.

I should have thought that made everything all right.

GRACE.

It's come too late. I'm--soiled. Afterwards--you know what I mean, when you and I--the first thing I felt was surprise because I found myself no different. I thought when a woman had done that everything would seem altered. But I felt just the same as before. It's only now. It's like the stain of blood--don't you remember--not all the perfumes of Arabia....

COBBETT.

[_Worried and moved._] You know, it's absurd to take it like that.

GRACE.

[_With increasing agitation._] Oh, what have I done! If I'd only had the strength to resist! It's now that I see it all, the utter degradation of it, the hateful ugliness. Oh, I loathe myself. How can I take my heart to Claude when there's you standing between us?

COBBETT.

I'm awfully sorry, Grace.

GRACE.

I'd give anything in the world if I hadn't done what I have done. I might be so happy now. I haven't a chance. The fates are against me. What's the good of loving Claude now--I'm not fit to be his wife.

[_She is beside herself._ COBBETT, _not knowing what to do, stands looking at her. The sound is heard of a motor-horn blowing._

COBBETT.

[_With a slight start._] What's that?

GRACE.

It's Rooney. He's afraid you'll miss the train. You'd better hurry up.

COBBETT.

I can't leave you like this.

GRACE.

[_Ironically._] I shouldn't like you to miss your train.

COBBETT.

I suppose you hate and loathe me.

GRACE.

I'd wish you were dead, only it wouldn't do me much good, would it?

COBBETT.

[_Reflectively._] The fact is, only the wicked should sin.... When the virtuous do things they shouldn't they do make such an awful hash of it.

[MOORE _comes in followed by the_ FOOTMAN.

GRACE.

What is it?

MOORE.

I was going to clear away, madam.

GRACE.

Oh, yes, I forgot. [_Holding out her hand to_ COBBETT.] You'll have to look sharp.

END OF THE THIRD ACT

THE FOURTH ACT

THE SCENE _is the same as in the first and second Acts, the drawing-room at Kenyon-Fulton_.

Two days have elapsed. It is about twelve o'clock in the morning.
MRS. INSOLEY _is seated with her dog on her lap, and_ MISS HALL _is reading the leading article of the_ Times _to her_.

MISS HALL.

[_Reading._] “ ... to whom it would give the suffrage are marked off from all citizens who have ever and anywhere enjoyed the franchise in great civil communities by physical differences which no legislation can affect. Women, they insist, pay rates and taxes as men do, and therefore, they argue, women ought to vote as men do. But rates and taxes may be imposed or abolished by legislation. Men may become ratepayers and taxpayers, or cease to be ratepayers and taxpayers. The one thing that no enthusiasm, no reasoning, no eloquence, demonstrations, or statutes can achieve is to make a woman a man.”

MRS. INSOLEY.

How true that is, Louisa.

MISS HALL.

I've always thought exactly the same myself, Mrs. Insoley.

MRS. INSOLEY.

And there's another thing, Louisa. No man can become a mother.

MISS HALL.

[_Reflectively._] No, I suppose not.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Have you any doubts on the subject, Louisa?

MISS HALL.

Oh, no, Mrs. Insoley.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Ironically._] You may take it from me that no man can become a mother. And apparently very few women either nowadays.

[ARCHIBALD INSOLEY _comes in_.

ARCHIBALD.

Good morning, mother.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Good morning, my dear.

[_He bends down and kisses her._

ARCHIBALD.

Good morning, Miss Hall.

MISS HALL.

Good morning.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Louisa, you may read the rest of that article to yourself in the garden.

MISS HALL.

[_Getting up._] Very well, Mrs. Insoley. Shall I take the dog?

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Handing it over._] Yes. And be very careful with him. He says he's not very well to-day.

[MISS HALL _takes the dog and goes out_.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I'm glad to have an opportunity of talking to you, Archibald. I've fancied that you've been rather avoiding me the last day or two.

ARCHIBALD.

[_Cheerfully._] Oh, no, my dear mother.

MRS. INSOLEY.

When I asked Grace to invite Helen Vernon to stay here for a few days, it was in the confident hope that you would make her a proposal of marriage.

ARCHIBALD.

I respect and esteem Miss Vernon, but I confess that no warmer feeling has ever entered my bosom.

MRS. INSOLEY.

It's not necessary that warm feelings should enter a clergyman's bosom, Archibald. She's of very good family indeed, and an heiress. Five thousand acres and a house that's only just been done up.

ARCHIBALD.

[_With a chuckle._] If there only weren't a wife to be taken along with the property!

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_With a twinkle in her eyes._] It shouldn't be necessary for me to tell a person of your profession that none of the pleasures of this world can be had without some drawback.

ARCHIBALD.

What a pity it is you weren't a man, mother. You would have made such a bishop.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Are you trying to change the conversation, Archibald?

ARCHIBALD.

I don't think it would be a bad idea.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Then I will only say one thing more. I am the meekest woman in the world, and a lamb could lead me. But I should like to remind you that

the living of Kenyon-Fulton is not worth more than a hundred and seventy a year, and if you can keep a curate and live like a gentleman it's only owing to my generosity.

ARCHIBALD.

I'm quite prepared to live on a hundred and seventy a year, mother. I dare say it would have just as good an effect on my figure as matrimony.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Rather crossly._] I don't know what you're talking about, Archibald.

ARCHIBALD.

I understood you to recommend marriage as a sort of heroic remedy for corpulence.

MRS. INSOLEY.

You have nothing against Helen, I presume?

ARCHIBALD.

[_Smiling._] I could have wished that fewer summers had passed over a fringe which I shrewdly suspect to be artificial.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Of course it's artificial, but you're no chicken yourself, Archibald.

ARCHIBALD.

On the contrary, I'm much too old a bird to be caught by chaff.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I'm sure we don't want another flighty young thing in the family.

ARCHIBALD.

I don't think Grace has been very flighty the last day or two.

MRS. INSOLEY.

What's the matter with her? She's been going about with a face as long as one of your sermons.

ARCHIBALD.

I'm afraid Peggy's death upset her very much.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_Irritably._] That's the worst of those sort of people, they have no self-control. If she's going to give way like this at the death of a kitchen-maid, what on earth is she going to do at the death of a duchess?

ARCHIBALD.

Is it a riddle, mother?

[GRACE _comes in. She looks tired and worn. She is in a very nervous state. She gives the impression that any folly, any wildness may be expected from her._]

GRACE.

Good morning, Archibald.

ARCHIBALD.

Good morning.

GRACE.

I thought you'd be at the inquest.

ARCHIBALD.

No. There was no need for me to go. And Claude seemed to think he'd rather I didn't.

MRS. INSOLEY.

What is this?

ARCHIBALD.

The inquest on Peggy Gann.

GRACE.

Have you seen Claude?

ARCHIBALD.

He looked in at the Rectory for five minutes. I'm afraid he's awfully worried.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I have no patience with Claude. He should have more self-respect than to let such a thing worry him.

ARCHIBALD.

He's afraid he may be asked some very unpleasant questions.

MRS. INSOLEY.

You seem entirely to forget the relative positions of the parties concerned. If Claude doesn't want to answer an impertinent question, it's the easiest thing in the world for him to fly into a passion and refuse. Who is the coroner?

GRACE.

His name is Davies. He's the local doctor.

MRS. INSOLEY.

You're not going to suggest that the local doctor would dream of asking a question unless he was quite sure Claude was prepared to answer it?

ARCHIBALD.

Davies is an advanced Radical. I'm afraid he may take the opportunity to have a fling at Claude.

MRS. INSOLEY.

I'm all at sea. In my day we wouldn't have stood a doctor for five minutes who was a Radical. We'd have made life unbearable for him until he became a Conservative or left the district.

ARCHIBALD.

[_With a shrug of the shoulders._] You're looking rather dicky, Grace.

GRACE.

Oh, I'm quite well, thank you.

MRS. INSOLEY.

Am I mistaken in thinking you have rouge on your cheeks?

GRACE.

I've not been sleeping very well, and I didn't want to look ill.

MRS. INSOLEY.

In my young days ladies did not paint their faces.

GRACE.

[_With suppressed rage._] We don't live in your young days, and I'm not a lady.

MRS. INSOLEY.

[_With a chuckle at the opportunity_ GRACE _has given her_.] As you are my hostess, it would be insolent of me to contradict you, my dear Grace.

[_Delighted with her repartee, she gets up and walks out of the room._ GRACE _goes up to the looking-glass over the chimney-piece and rubs her cheeks with a handkerchief_.]

ARCHIBALD.

I wonder if you'd be very angry if I said something to you?

GRACE.

[_Icily._] Do you object to the way I do my hair, or is it the cut of my skirt that doesn't quite meet with your approval?

ARCHIBALD.

I was going to say something to you about Claude.

[GRACE _gives a slight, an almost imperceptible start, but does not answer or look round_.]

ARCHIBALD.

You know how funny he is. He doesn't say much when anything's on his mind. But if one knows him well it's not hard to tell when something's bothering him.... He's awfully worried about you.

GRACE.

[_Still looking in the glass._] I don't know why I should worry him now more than I usually do.

ARCHIBALD.

He's afraid you blame him for Peggy's death.

GRACE.

Why should I?

ARCHIBALD.

He feels it was his fault.

GRACE.

I suppose it was in a way.

ARCHIBALD.

He's so fond of you he can't bear to think that--that it's made a difference to you.

GRACE.

Has he said anything to you about it?

ARCHIBALD.

No.

GRACE.

Perhaps it's only your fancy. [_Turning round._] Why are you telling me now?

ARCHIBALD.

I'm afraid he'll have rather a rough time at the inquest. I thought you might say something to buck him up a little. A word or two from you would mean so much.

[_There is a short pause._]

GRACE.

I think it's so strange that you should say all this to me now. It's not as if we'd ever been great friends, is it?

ARCHIBALD.

Our best friends are always those who put us in a good conceit of ourselves. I always think it's a dreadful thing when a man loses his nerve.... You can do so much for Claude if you choose.

GRACE.

I think you exaggerate the influence I have over him. After all, he's always taken care to keep me and his life strictly apart.

ARCHIBALD.

I think you should remember that if he made a mistake it was an honest one. He wouldn't be human if he didn't put his foot in it sometimes.

GRACE.

You speak as if I were perfection itself.

ARCHIBALD.

And then, if he was so determined not to break that particular rule of the estate, it was partly for your sake, wasn't it? Because he thought it his duty to keep you from any possibility of contact with evil.

GRACE.

Did he tell you that?

ARCHIBALD.

No. It was not very difficult to guess.

GRACE.

I suppose not--for anyone who had eyes to see.

ARCHIBALD.

You will do your best, Grace?

GRACE.

What do you suggest I should do?

ARCHIBALD.

It's very difficult for me to tell you. I think the chief thing is that you should tell Claude--if you can--that you're fond of him, and that, whatever happens, you always will be fond of him.

GRACE.

[_Hoarsely._] That oughtn't to be very hard. I love him with all my

heart and soul.

ARCHIBALD.

[_Smiling._] If you could only say that to him--just in that way, as if you really felt it--you would make him so happy.

[_There is a pause._ GRACE _puts her hands in front of her eyes, and she keeps them there for a moment so that she should not see_ ARCHIBALD _while she is speaking_.

GRACE.

Archibald, I want to speak to you for a minute--as a clergyman.

ARCHIBALD.

My dear Grace, you frighten me.

GRACE.

I'm sorry if I've been often bitter and unkind to you. I'm ashamed when I think of all the silly, cruel things I must have said to you during the ten years I've lived here.

ARCHIBALD.

[_Cheerfully._] Oh, what nonsense! You've got a clever tongue, and like most people who have, you can't resist saying a sharp thing when it strikes you.

GRACE.

I've often set out to wound you. I've been fiendish sometimes. I'd like you to know that I'm grateful to you for being so patient with me. It wouldn't be surprising if you loathed me.

ARCHIBALD.

Oh, I think I've always had a very great affection for you, Grace. I know you've often found life down here rather dull. If any allowances have been necessary, I've been perfectly ready to make them.

GRACE.

I expect I was often unjust to you. I sometimes felt you weren't quite sincere.... I thought you'd only become a clergyman on account of the living and the house.

ARCHIBALD.

Yes, I felt that. But I couldn't bear you any ill-will on that account. It was true.

[GRACE _turns and looks at him with startled eyes_.

ARCHIBALD.

I'm afraid I'm not much in the way of parsons. My class means so much more to me than my calling. I know it's a mistake, and yet I can't help it. I'm bound down by conventions that I haven't the will to escape from. The day's past of the family living, the perquisite of a younger son, and I'm out of place here. I can't feel that the position is mine by right as my Uncle Robert felt before me, and I haven't the enthusiasm which might make me feel I'd earned it by my own efforts.

GRACE.

I'm so ashamed of myself. Because people didn't carry their hearts on their sleeves I thought they had no hearts at all.

ARCHIBALD.

For three years after I was ordained I was a curate at Wakefield. I was worked so hard that I never had a moment to myself. I think those were my happy days. And that's what I ought to do now. I ought to exchange all this for some living in a city, and do some real work before it's too late. But I haven't the courage. And then I should do no good, for I haven't conviction. That's why I have no influence in the parish. They come to me for beef-tea and for coal-tickets, but when it's real help they want they go elsewhere. All I'm fit for is to hold a family living and dine with the neighbouring gentry. You summed me up with the utmost precision.

GRACE.

I don't think so any more. I have an idea that perhaps one sees people most truly when one sees them charitably.

ARCHIBALD.

[_With a smile._] You said you wanted to speak to me, and I've been talking only about myself.

GRACE.

I think you've made it a little easier for me, Archibald. It's kind of you.

[_She pauses and there is a silence. She walks up and down the room

in agitation._

GRACE.

[_With a series of little gasps._] Archibald, I'm dreadfully unhappy. I've done something which I bitterly regret. I don't know how to tell you. But I must tell you.... I've been unfaithful to Claude.

ARCHIBALD.

Grace, you must be mad. You can't mean what you say. It's--it's impossible.

GRACE.

It's torturing me. It's torturing me.

ARCHIBALD.

But I don't understand. You don't mean that....

GRACE.

[_Desperately._] Oh, yes, I mean exactly what I say. Please understand me.

ARCHIBALD.

You said you were in love with Claude.

GRACE.

Yes. That's why I can't bear the agony of it. I'm so unhappy. I'm so dreadfully unhappy. I want you to help me. I want you to tell me what to do.

[_There is a moment's pause._ ARCHIBALD _is so bewildered that he can find not a word to say_.

GRACE.

You can hardly believe it, can you? It sounds incredible. Sometimes I can't help saying to myself that it is not possible it should be true.

ARCHIBALD.

[_Trying to collect himself._] It's come as a most dreadful blow.

GRACE.

Don't reproach me. I've said all the obvious things to myself already.... Oh, I hate myself.

ARCHIBALD.

I'm so bewildered. Why d'you tell _me_? I feel I ought to ask you all sorts of questions, and I can't bear to ask you anything.

GRACE.

I don't think anything matters but that I've behaved odiously. Claude was always very good to me, and I've deceived him. And every kindness, every word of love he says to me is a reproach. And I love him with all my soul, and there's always the horror of what I've done between us. And I can't bear it any longer.

ARCHIBALD.

I'm so helpless.

GRACE.

Are you going to tell Claude?

ARCHIBALD.

I? You must be mad.

GRACE.

I thought perhaps you might feel it was your duty. You're his brother.

ARCHIBALD.

It would never occur to me to betray the confidence you've put in me.

GRACE.

Then what shall I do?

ARCHIBALD.

I can't advise you. I haven't got the experience. I know so little of the world.

GRACE.

You _must_ advise me. I'm at the end of my strength. I can't go on like this any more.

ARCHIBALD.

Is it all over between you and ... you know what I mean?

GRACE.

Yes, it's all over.

ARCHIBALD.

I don't know what to say to you. I'm awfully sorry.

GRACE.

[_Desperately._] Is there no one who can do anything for me?

ARCHIBALD.

I suppose nobody else knows?

GRACE.

Helen Vernon. She found out. But I can't go to her for advice. I can't. I can't humiliate myself. And the remorse is just killing me.

ARCHIBALD.

It's so difficult for me to say things that won't seem sanctimonious. I don't want to say a word that you can think is a reproach.

GRACE.

I don't mind what you say so long as you help me.

[_There is a moment's pause._]

ARCHIBALD.

[_Hesitatingly._] We're taught that there's one course clear to the sinner that repenteth.

[GRACE _starts to her feet and looks at him wildly_.

GRACE.

You want me to tell Claude?

ARCHIBALD.

[_In a low voice._] I don't see how there can be forgiveness till one

has confessed one's sin.

GRACE.

[_With a deep, deep sigh._] Oh, if you knew what a relief it would be! For days I've been fighting with the temptation to make a clean breast of it. I've been trying to keep it from me, trying not to think of it. But it meets me at every turn. It haunts me. It's like an obsession, and it's stronger than I am. It's driving me--driving me to confess. I know I shall have to do it; I can't help myself. I shall go mad if I don't tell him.

ARCHIBALD.

For goodness' sake, calm yourself.

GRACE.

If I'd told him before, when I was trying to persuade him to let Gann stay, that girl wouldn't have died. I hadn't the courage. I wouldn't sacrifice myself. It was too much to ask me. And since then I've been tortured by remorse. They say she had the suicidal instinct, and would have killed herself for almost anything. But I seem to see her lying there reproaching me. Reproaching me.

ARCHIBALD.

Why don't you go to Claude at once and get it over?

GRACE.

I'm frightened. I'm just sick with fear. A dozen times I've been on the point of it--just to have done with it, to get rid of the agony that burnt my heart--and at the last moment I couldn't. But it's like being on a high place and looking down and holding on to something so that you shouldn't throw yourself over. Sooner or later I shall have to do it. It's the only way to get back my self-respect. It's the only chance I have of living at all.

ARCHIBALD.

I wish I could do more for you.

GRACE.

No one can do anything for me. Oh, it is cruel. And to come just now when I love Claude! I didn't love him at first. It came quite suddenly--as if scales had been torn away from my eyes. And it wasn't till then that I saw the sin and the wickedness of it. Oh, it was so much more than sin and wickedness. The filthiness. The only thing's to

tell him and have done with it. You know he'll divorce me, don't you?

ARCHIBALD.

He loves you so much.

GRACE.

Even if it breaks his heart, he'll force himself to divorce me. You know what Claude is. He'll think it's his duty. He'll do what he thinks he ought to do even if it kills him. Oh, but if he'd only forgive me, I would try to make amends. It's so hard that I've only learnt how to be a good wife now that I'm unfit to be his wife at all.

ARCHIBALD.

[_Deeply moved._] Be brave, Grace.

[_She looks at him for a moment, then suddenly makes up her mind. She takes a letter from her dress and sits down at the desk. She puts it into an envelope on which she writes_ CLAUDE'S _name_.]

GRACE.

Will you ring the bell?

ARCHIBALD.

[_Touching it._] What are you going to do?

GRACE.

It's a letter that I had from--the other. It's proof of everything. I felt I couldn't tell Claude. It was hopeless. And I thought I'd just press it into his hand....

[_As she is speaking_ MOORE _comes in. She hands him the letter._]

GRACE.

Have that given to Mr. Insoley the moment he comes in.

MOORE.

Very good, madam.

[_Exit._]

ARCHIBALD.

[_Startled._] D'you mean to say you're going to tell him like that?

GRACE.

It's the only way I _can_ do it.

ARCHIBALD.

[_Overcome._] Good God, what have I done?

GRACE.

He'll read the letter, and then the worst will be over. I couldn't have told him--I couldn't.

ARCHIBALD.

I hope you've done right.

GRACE.

Anyhow, it's the end of everything--just when I might have started a new life.... I wonder when I shall have to go away from here?

ARCHIBALD.

Don't put it like that.

GRACE.

[_Looking out of the window._] I thought I hated the place. It's bored me to the verge of tears. And now I shall never again see the night fall on the park slowly. And I feel ... and I feel that with me, too, those great trees, and the meadows, and the cawing rooks have come to be part of my blood and my bones.

[_The door is opened, and_ GRACE _gives a start and a little frightened cry_. HELEN VERNON _comes in_.]

GRACE.

Oh, I thought it was Claude.

[_She puts her hand to her heart and steadies herself against a chair._]

MISS VERNON.

What on earth's the matter?

GRACE.

[_With a gesture of the head towards_ ARCHIBALD.] I've told him about me and....

MISS VERNON.

[_In short exclamation, which does not interrupt_ GRACE.] Oh!

GRACE.

I'm going to tell Claude. It's the only thing to do.

MISS VERNON.

[_To_ ARCHIBALD, _sharply_.] Is that your advice? You fool, Archibald!

GRACE.

I can't bear the torture any more.

MISS VERNON.

I suspected you were thinking of something like this. But you wouldn't let me speak to you.

GRACE.

I've been struggling against it, and now I've made up my mind.

MISS VERNON.

My dear, there are three good rules in life. The first is--never sin; and that's the most sensible. The second is--if you sin, never repent; and that's the bravest. But the third is--if you repent, never never confess; and that's the hardest of them all.

ARCHIBALD.

I don't think this is the time for flippancy, Helen.

MISS VERNON.

Good heavens, I'm being as serious as I possibly can.

ARCHIBALD.

D'you mean to say you think Grace oughtn't to say anything?

MISS VERNON.

I think it would be monstrous of her to say anything.

ARCHIBALD.

If the sinner wants forgiveness, first of all he must confess his sin.

MISS VERNON.

You still look upon your God as a God of vengeance, who wants sacrifices to appease Him.

ARCHIBALD.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.”

MISS VERNON.

That was said to a stiff-necked generation that wanted humbling. But no one can want to humble us, surely. We're so timid already. We're so unsure of ourselves. We've all got a morbid desire to unbosom ourselves. The commonest ailment of the day is a vulgar feminine passion for making scenes. Confession's like a drug we fly to because we've lost the last shadow of our self-reliance.

ARCHIBALD.

Don't let her move you, Grace. I beseech you, for your soul's sake. Be brave.

GRACE.

I know that it's my only chance of happiness.

MISS VERNON.

But who cares about your happiness?

ARCHIBALD.

Helen, how can you be so unkind?

MISS VERNON.

No one knows why we've been brought into the world, but it evidently wasn't for our happiness. Or if it was, the Being who put us here has made a most outrageous mess of it. Put your happiness out of the question.

ARCHIBALD.

[_Very earnestly to_ GRACE.] If the sinner repents, let him confess his sin. That's the only proof he can give of a contrite spirit.

MISS VERNON.

Nonsense. He can give a much more sensible proof by acting differently in future.

GRACE.

That would be so easy now.

MISS VERNON.

But actions aren't good because they're difficult.

GRACE.

Part of my punishment is the feeling that except for this horrible mistake we should both be so much happier than we were before.

MISS VERNON.

You love Claude now, don't you?

GRACE.

With all my heart.

MISS VERNON.

I have an idea that it's only your sin that has made your love worth having.

ARCHIBALD.

[_Rather shocked._] Helen.

MISS VERNON.

You were rather hard and selfish before because you had nothing in particular to reproach yourself with. Perhaps it was necessary that you should step from the narrow path of virtue in order to become a virtuous woman.

ARCHIBALD.

Helen, you can't mean that.

MISS VERNON.

It's very often only repentance that makes men and women human.

ARCHIBALD.

Repentance is useless without sacrifice.

GRACE.

Yes, I feel that. And the only sacrifice I can make is to lay bare my soul before Claude and accept my punishment.

ARCHIBALD.

And then, I think Claude should be given the chance of deciding for himself. It's not fair to leave him in ignorance.

MISS VERNON.

[_To_ GRACE.] Don't you know that Claude loves you, and trusts you, and believes in you?

GRACE.

That is all my torment. I'm so unworthy. If I didn't love him--if I didn't want him to love me so much--it wouldn't be so dreadful.... I can't bear that there should be this secret between us. I know that he's not loving me, but some fancy of his own heart. And I'm jealous. I'm jealous of the woman he loves who isn't me. And I want him to love me as I am, as I love him.

MISS VERNON.

Grace, don't forget that I've loved him, too, hopelessly, without any thought of a return. It gives me some claim, doesn't it?

[ARCHIBALD _looks at her quickly, with surprise, but does not speak_.

MISS VERNON.

The only thing I care for is his happiness. And I beseech you to have mercy on him.

GRACE.

What do you mean?

MISS VERNON.

If you destroy his belief in you he'll have nothing left. He thinks he's strong, but he isn't. He depends on a few simple principles, and some of them are already giving way under his feet. He wants you now more than ever. You can give him back his self-reliance. And you're going to humiliate him. Besides everything else, the misery and the grief, don't you see what a blow it'll be to his vanity? I beseech you to have mercy.

GRACE.

You're asking me to go on living the hateful lie. But I can't breathe. The air about me seems heavy with deceit. If Claude doesn't love me for what I am, what can his love be to me?

MISS VERNON.

My dear, it's not for ourselves that our friends love us, but for the grace and the beauty that they've given us out of their own hearts. And the only way we can show them our gratitude is by doing all we can to preserve those precious illusions they have about us.

GRACE.

I don't want a love that's based on illusion. At the back of my mind there was the hope that if I told Claude, some day in the future he might forgive me. And we could start fresh with mutual knowledge and mutual confidence. But if I don't tell him, we can never come together. Even though we're not separated for an hour, there'll always be this barrier between us.

MISS VERNON.

Then let that be your punishment.

GRACE.

[_Startled._] That! [_With a little laugh of scorn._] You don't know what you're asking me to do. It's because I love Claude so much that I _can't_ let him go on thinking I'm good and pure and chaste.

ARCHIBALD.

And how can good come out of a lie, Helen?

MISS VERNON.

Perhaps it wouldn't be a lie always. Don't you remember the Happy Hypocrite? Love can work many miracles.

GRACE.

[_With a sort of gasp._] You mean--you think I might become really what Claude thinks me?

MISS VERNON.

You might try.

GRACE.

D'you know that I should never have a moment's peace?

MISS VERNON.

If you love Claude really, that mightn't be too great a price to pay for his happiness.

GRACE.

[_Vehemently._] Oh, it's all very well for you to talk, but you don't know what this sense of shame is. It's killing me. And the degradation of being loved for what you're not. And you want me never to escape from it. Oh, you're right. It would be a fiendish punishment.

MISS VERNON.

It's the only return you can make for all the love that Claude has given you.

GRACE.

[_Taking up the thought._] For his wonderful kindness, and all these years of thought and loving tenderness.

[_For a moment_ GRACE _stares in front of her as the words sink in_.

MISS VERNON.

Grace, it's I who ask you now to be brave.

GRACE.

[_With a great sigh._] I seem to see the chance of a greater sacrifice than anything I'd ever dreamt of. I wonder.... I believe there's a chance.... [_With a sudden start._] Oh! listen.

[_She has heard_ CLAUDE _come in. There is a sound of voices in the hall._

GRACE.

That's settled it. It's too late now to do anything.

MISS VERNON.

What is it?

GRACE.

Claude's just come in. I heard him speaking to Moore. He's been given the letter.

MISS VERNON.

D'you mean to say.... [_Some part of the facts dawns upon her and she bursts out violently._] Oh, it's not that the human race are wicked that I mind, or that they're weak--you _can_ give them backbone; but what I can't get over is that they are such blooming fools.

GRACE.

Will you leave me, both of you? Claude had better find me alone.

MISS VERNON.

[_To_ ARCHIBALD, _after a glance at_ GRACE.] Come.

[_They go out._ GRACE _is horribly frightened. She stands quite still, pulling her handkerchief about._ CLAUDE _comes in._ _He has a letter in his hand. He flings it on a table._ GRACE _sees with a start that it is unopened_.

GRACE.

[_Forcing herself to seem natural._] Is the inquest over?

CLAUDE.

[_Sinking dejectedly into a chair._] They brought in a verdict of suicide while of unsound mind.

GRACE.

That was what you expected, wasn't it?

CLAUDE.

Yes.

GRACE.

You must be thankful it's finished and done with.

CLAUDE.

[_With an effort._] The jury passed a vote of censure on me.

GRACE.

Claude!

CLAUDE.

Oh, if you'd only heard the questions they asked me! There were reporters there, so it'll be in the papers and you can read for yourself. They made me appear a perfect brute.

GRACE.

I'm sure it wasn't as bad as you fancy.

CLAUDE.

You see, I hadn't a chance of defending myself. I wasn't going to make excuses to a parcel of Dissenting shopkeepers. It made me look as if I hadn't a leg to stand on.

GRACE.

After all, what can it matter what a dozen yokels think of you?

CLAUDE.

And afterwards when I came out--they had the inquest in that big room upstairs at the Insoley Arms--there was a crowd outside, people I'd known all my life, I suppose they'd been taking the opportunity to have a good soak, and they hissed me as I passed.

GRACE.

Didn't you say that you were going to abolish the rule?

CLAUDE.

Of course I'm going to abolish the rule. Hang it all, it's caused wretchedness enough.

GRACE.

I wish you'd had an opportunity of telling them.

CLAUDE.

[_Rather shamefacedly._] The coroner asked me what I was going to do about it. I couldn't knuckle under then with all those people round me. I simply couldn't, Grace. I was obliged to say that I meant to be master in my own house, and I didn't propose to let anyone dictate to me.

GRACE.

[_Putting her hand on his shoulder._] I'm afraid you've been awfully worried, old man.

CLAUDE.

It's given me a bit of a knock to find out that they--they just hate me. I was rather fond of the people on the estate, and I thought they were fond of me. When they've been in trouble I've done every damned thing I could to help them. When times have been bad I've not bothered much about the rents, and we've never been rich. Hang it all, I've given them all my time and my thoughts for years, and the only result is that they can't stick me. They haven't got any mercy if I've made a mistake. They give me no credit for good intentions.

GRACE.

I'm sure you exaggerate, Claude. You fancy they feel more bitter than they really do.

CLAUDE.

Oh, if you'd only seen them! The pleasure they took in having a dig at me! I could see the hatred on their faces. Oh, I expect Archibald is right. Our time down here is over. The only fellow they want in the country now is the Jew stockbroker with his pockets full of money.

GRACE.

Darling, _I_ know that you've always acted for the best. _I_ know how much you've done for the people on the estate. After all, it wasn't for their gratitude that you did it, was it? It was because it was your duty.

CLAUDE.

[_Rising._] Oh, Grace, I don't know what I should do without you. You've been so awfully good to me through the whole thing. I'm so grateful to you.

GRACE.

What nonsense!

CLAUDE.

I was so afraid it would make a difference to you, but it hasn't, has it?

GRACE.

[_Shaking her head._] No.

CLAUDE.

If I lost you, Grace, I couldn't live. Without you--I can't imagine life without you.

GRACE.

How absurd you are, Claude.

CLAUDE.

I'm talking rot, aren't I?

[_He notices the letter, which he had put on the table, and picks it up._ GRACE _catches her breath_.

CLAUDE.

Hulloa! I forgot to open this. Moore gave it me as I came in. [_With surprise._] It's your hand-writing.

GRACE.

[_Quite naturally, holding out her hand._] It's nothing. I was afraid I should have gone out by the time you came in, and I wanted to remind you about the herbaceous border. It's only a note.

CLAUDE.

[_Giving her the letter._] Are you going out?

GRACE.

I was going to motor to Wells with Helen Vernon.

[_As she speaks she tears the letter into little bits._

CLAUDE.

Don't leave me to-day, Grace. I want you so awfully badly.

GRACE.

[_Sinking with exhaustion into a chair._] No, I won't leave you ... if you want me.

[CLAUDE _kneels down by her side._

CLAUDE.

I always want you, Grace. You're so much to me.... After all, nothing can really matter to me so long as I have you. It's such a comfort to think that I can trust you. And you'll never round on me. I'm awfully grateful for you, Grace.

[_He buries his face in her lap, kissing her hands._

GRACE.

[_In a trembling voice._] I can never be such a wife to you as you deserve, Claude. But I can try. If you can believe in me always, Claude, perhaps in time I can become what you believe me. [_He makes a movement._] No, don't look at me. I want you to know that I love you with all my heart, I love you with my body, and I love you with my soul. I want to forget myself and think only of you. What does my happiness matter so long as I can make you happy?

[_She bends down and kisses his hair._

THE END

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